

**OPENING ADDRESS BY A/P HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW AND HOME AFFAIRS, CHAIRMAN, INTER-MINISTRY COMMITTEE ON YOUTH CRIME AT THE DINNER CUM APPOINTMENT CEREMONY OF HONORARY VOLUNTEER SPECIAL CONSTABULARY SENIOR OFFICERS AT THE RAFFLES TOWN CLUB ON 4 JANUARY, 7.30PM**

Council members of the National Crime Prevention Council,

Council members of the National Council Against Drug Abuse,

Members of the Inter-Ministry on Youth Crime,

Commissioner of Police,

Distinguished Guests,

Good evening. It is my pleasure to be here tonight, to join all of you who have contributed your time and energy to help youths, in the National Crime Prevention Council, the National Council Against Drug Abuse, the Honorary Volunteer Special Constabulary (VSC), and the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime.

2 Tonight we pay tribute to a special group of people – Honorary VSC officers who have made a significant difference to the lives of our young. We are also here to witness the appointment of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Batches of officers under the Honorary VSC (School) scheme as well as the re-appointment of the 1<sup>st</sup> batch of Hon VSC officers and the launch of the new information pamphlets and posters on

the Scheme. Tonight, we are also here to witness the launch of a new anti-drug book from the National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA).

### **The Honorary VSC against Youth Crimes**

3 Juvenile delinquency and youth crimes are issues that are extremely close to my heart. I share your concerns as a parent in this new Internet Age – a borderless world of unlimited information that can be used for both good and bad. All of us – parents, schools, local communities, and the government – have a stake and a shared responsibility to work towards a better future for our young. In our schools, teachers who have stepped forward to serve as Honorary VSC officers, in other words, many of you here - you make a difference to your school disciplinary environment.

### **Decline in Youth Crime**

4 Last year, there was a 17 per cent drop in the number of youths arrested from January to September 2000 compared to figures of youths arrested for the first three quarters of 1999. When compared with the statistics two years ago – in 1998 over the same nine-month period, the drop is 44 percent. Well done. All of you here have played a key role in helping to steer our youths away from the influence of crimes. However, as I have said before, let me repeat it here. Statistics only tell part of the story. Every young offender is an unnecessary potential waste of a life. We must press on with our efforts to steer every young life to keep to the straight and narrow path.

5 The Honorary VSC (School) Scheme is part of an integrated multi-pronged effort spearheaded by the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime, or IMYC, to address challenges posed by juvenile delinquency and youth crime. Not only does the scheme enable schools to deal with the problem of student delinquency more effectively, it also fosters stronger links between the schools and their immediate community agencies.

6 The Scheme was first piloted in 1997 with just 11 teachers. There was initial apprehension. Some teachers felt it would lead to more work. Others felt, in uniform, they would lose their focus as teachers. These concerns were recognised and addressed. I am glad to see that this initiative has succeeded. The scheme has now expanded from the initial 11 teachers to 170 teachers and Operations Managers, emplaced in 115 secondary schools and three Vocational Training Centres. Undoubtedly, the success of this Scheme is due, in no small measure, to the support of school principals.

### **New initiatives**

7 At the Appointment Ceremony of the 5<sup>th</sup> batch of new officers in 1999, Commissioner Khoo Boon Hui mentioned that the Ministry of Education and the Police were reviewing how the Scheme could be further enhanced.

8 Several initiatives have since been implemented. These include the inclusion of School Operations Managers in the scheme and closer networking between Police and the schools. Thus, each Police Land Division will now organise annual

networking meetings with school clusters to discuss issues on managing juvenile delinquency and combating crimes. In this way, schools will become more aware of the many police and other IMYC programmes. A set of exhibition panels, pamphlets, posters and video to spread and promote the spirit of the Honorary VSC has also been produced.

9 The drop in youth crimes is encouraging, but we must never let it lull us into a false sense of complacency. What else can we do? How do we make our schools and its surroundings even safer so that learning can thrive? How do we recognise the early warning signs of delinquency? How do we teach our young to resolve their differences peacefully? How do we share good ideas amongst various community agencies? How can we get people who have been hurt to forgive those who have hurt them, instead of trying to get even? These are important questions that have no quick-fix solutions.

### **"Broken Mirror"**

10 The same concerns prevail in our anti-drug drive. NCADA has produced a book "Broken Mirror" to nurture a better understanding of our drug abuse problem. The book underscores the importance of the family unit and support structures in our fight against drug abuse. The book, written by a local writer Dawn Tan, is a compilation of short stories relating the experiences of ex-drug addicts, their family members, aftercare counsellors and enforcement officers.

11 The book is targeted at youths aged between 13-18 years. Given that potential juvenile delinquents are often also vulnerable to drug abuse, I am sure many of you will find this book interesting and enlightening both for yourselves and the students you deal with. Having said this, I am happy to note that drug abuse amongst our young is not a serious problem. Indeed, drug abuse amongst youths below 20 years old has fallen by 24% for the first nine months of 2000 as compared to the same period in 1999. CNB's statistics also show that the total number of drug abusers arrested for the year 2000 is likely to decrease for the sixth consecutive year since 1994. But every effort at prevention, such as this book, is well worth the effort. As in youth crime, every young person, indeed, every person who falls to the lures of drugs is one too many.

### **Broken Windows theory**

12 I hope this book will move and touch many lives to positive action. Some who are caught in the drug trap to turn resolutely from it. Many others to be firmly resolved never to touch harmful drugs, yet others to decide to also lend a hand as volunteers to fight drug-abuse. As Nirmal Ghosh, a Straits Times foreign correspondent, who reviewed the book, says

"It took great courage for the people in these pages to tell their stories... Each story is both a warning and a gift."

13 When I first heard about this book "Broken Mirrors", it reminded me of the "Broken Windows" phenomenon. This was first expressed by political scientist James Q. Wilson and criminologist George Kelling in 1982. They say,

"If you have a building and somebody breaks a window and you say to yourself, I'm too busy with my business, I'm too busy with everything else to worry about that one broken window, it is very likely that in a short period of time somebody will break another window and yet another window. Eventually, they will break all the windows in your building, and your building will become run-down because you thought the first problem was so minor you didn't have to deal with it.

On the other hand, if someone breaks your window and you fix it right away, and you find the person who did it, and you make it clear to them that this is unacceptable behaviour, that you can't destroy property of other people, and this is an important thing, then you are probably going to save your whole building. And if you keep fixing those windows right away, they will get the point."

14 How does this apply to our work? We know that sporadic juvenile violence and casual juvenile drug use is difficult to eradicate. But we must try to identify and fix the small wrongs before they de-generate to more serious criminal behaviour.

15 To our 63 new VSC officers, as well as our experienced officers, I hope that you are encouraged by the work being done. What you are doing now is similar to the mending of broken windows. You are mending each window as they are broken so that the whole building will be saved and so that others can learn the lesson as well.

16 Tonight, I ask all who are gathered here to re-affirm your commitment to the hard work that lies ahead - to work together to help our young live useful lives. I am confident that all of us can make significant contributions to our anti-drug abuse drive and management of juvenile delinquency and the prevention of youth crime in our schools.

17 Thank you.