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**SPEECH BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE,
SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND
LAW, CHAIRMAN OF THE INTER-MINISTRY COMMITTEE
ON YOUTH CRIME (IMYC) AT THE IMYC 10-YEAR
COMMEMORATIVE DINNER ON WEDNESDAY 29
NOVEMBER 2006, 7.35PM AT GRAND COPTHORNE
WATERFRONT SINGAPORE**

Mr Wong Kan Seng, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

2. I warmly welcome all former and present members of the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime, or IMYC to this milestone event. Ten years ago, we launched the IMYC, then known as IMJD or Inter-Ministry Committee on Juvenile Delinquency. This dinner is in appreciation of your hard work and contribution over the last decade.

3. Like Rome, the IMYC was not built in a day. When then PM Goh Chok Tong announced the formation of an inter-ministry committee to study issues such as dysfunctional families, drug abuse and juvenile delinquency in the mid-1990s, youth crime rates were alarming. The number of young Singaporeans arrested had nearly doubled in 10 years, from 691 cases in 1980 to 1,205 in 1990. This rose a further 74.4 per cent to 2,102, in 1994, which represented an average growth of 8.3 per cent a year over the 15-year period. Today, we have seen some success in tackling youth crime. Between 1997 and 2001, the number of youths arrested declined sharply. It rose in 2002 to over 4,400 arrests, in line with national crime trends, reaching a high of over 5,000 arrests in 2004. Through our intensified concerted efforts, the numbers fell to about 4,600 in 2005. This year, for the first six months, youth arrests registered a fall of 34% to some 1,600 youth arrests, compared to the same period last year. The improvement in the overall youth crime situation reflects the tremendous efforts put in by IMYC partners and agencies.

4. At various international seminars and conferences that I have officiated, foreign dignitaries and practitioners in the field are curious why our approach has worked. It is not easy for them to comprehend an inter-ministry approach where there is no guarding of turf, jealousy or jostling for funds. I tell them the reason is simple: IMYC members serve believing strongly in the cause and knowing that our efforts make a difference. These efforts complement each other, weaving a fabric where the strands together form a net which catches wayward youths and helps them bounce back in life. In this way, over these ten years, different members from the various Ministries and agencies have made contributions to our discussions at meetings where our passion and commitment were clearly evident. Many of you are here today. To all of you, especially the pioneers who were there with me when we first started - Bee Lian, Vasoo, Alfred - I say a big “Thank You”.

IMYC 10-Year Commemorative Book

5. This evening, Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng has kindly agreed to launch a Commemorative Book “The Right Side – Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime: Commemorating a Decade of Partnership to Rebuild Young

Lives”. This book showcases the many measures, programmes, services and schemes that IMYC partners and agencies have undertaken over the last decade. These valued partners include the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the National Council of Social Service, the Singapore Police Force, the Singapore Prison Service and the Subordinate Courts. We also tap the expertise of the National Crime Prevention Council and good-hearted, passionate academics who are also members. The National Youth Council acts as the Secretariat.

6. This book documents the contributions of key stakeholders in the youth crime scene, presents heart-felt accounts of their beliefs and values in nurturing our youths and most importantly, features a number of the success stories as well as achievements of the youths touched by IMYC’s outreach. We believe that there are lessons that can be learnt and applied by other Ministries and agencies in tackling problems that span a wide spectrum.

The IMYC Success Model

7. Youth crime is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon with no one size-fits-all solution, compounded by the fact that society is changing so rapidly. Hence, IMYC adopts a comprehensive three-fold approach in tackling youth crime – first, prevention and guidance; second, detection and enforcement and third, rehabilitation and restoration. Leveraging on the different expertise of its members, and using this framework, over the past 10 years or so, the Committee studied trends and issues that impact youths and devised strategies to address them. In a focussed manner, we implemented and co-ordinated over 50 new programmes and schemes. Many were ground-breaking in nature, such as the Honorary Voluntary Special Constabulary (VSC) Scheme, StreetWise Programme, Guidance Programme, National Mentoring Network, Out-of-School Youth Centres, Family Conferencing, Peer Mediation Programmes and School Social Work. Indeed, some had their detractors when we first introduced them. IMYC programmes have been effective because they were inclusive, tapping not only different government agencies, but also the social service sector, the community and family

as well, undergirded by the three key thrusts of commitment, collaboration and co-ordination.

8. Besides a quantitative increase in the number of programmes, the scope of the many measures implemented has also expanded. For example, the IMYC funding scheme has empowered youth organisations to initiate new and innovative programmes that cater directly to their clients. One such initiative is the Juvenile Justice Programme in Schools, or JJP, by Beyond Social Services. The programme, which has helped some 1,440 youths since its inception in 2004, is aimed at giving students who offend and those at risk of dropping out of school, the support to help them stay in school and out of trouble with the law. In 2006 alone, 1,200 students from 27 schools participated in the programme.

9. The JJP also adopts the concept of restorative justice to ensure that young offenders are accountable for their actions and committed towards repairing the harm they have caused. This is carried out via a Family Group Conference, which adopts a holistic approach involving the offender, victim and other relevant parties such as the

families, teachers and social workers in the justice process. It provides a safe environment for these parties to talk about the harm done and to develop a practical solution to rectify the damage.

Youth Engagement

10. Many young lives have been touched by IMYC efforts. Some from YMCA Project Bridge - they call themselves the *Woodlands Vendetta* - will be performing for us later. Besides coming in among the top five in a national competition, they have also performed on numerous occasions for the community. YMCA Project Bridge is a centre that provides alternative learning opportunities for Out-of-School-Youths. Indeed, you can say it was an early forerunner of the Northlight School. YMCA Project Bridge's programmes develop the youths in social, vocational, academic, life and recreational skills, aiming to leave a positive and lasting impact on their lives.

IMYC Name Change - The Next Lap

11. Tackling youth crime is a challenge that continues to evolve as society changes. We, on our part, must remain relevant. It has been ten years since the IMYC was formed.

Today I am pleased to announce a name change for the IMYC. Come January 2007, IMYC will be known as the **National Committee on Youth Guidance and Rehabilitation or NYGR in short**. The change in name is timely as it more accurately reflects the Committee's comprehensive and holistic approach to tackling youth crime.

12. When we first started in the 90's, we focussed largely on rehabilitation and intervention, addressing more immediate societal concerns on the rising number of youth arrests at that time. 10 years on, our programmes span a wider spectrum, in particular, going upstream to address developmental issues and tackling the phenomenon of pre-delinquency and the onset of problem behaviour. We are also doing more in the area of restorative practices. Moreover, many community agencies have aligned their programmes over the years to nurture positive youth development and devise prevention strategies, focusing on youths as assets by engaging them in positive activities and creating opportunities for their growth. .

13. I am sure the **National Committee on Youth Guidance and Rehabilitation** will continue to play an effective role in tackling youth crime. I have used the analogy before of how when we throw pebbles into the water, we create ripples that touch and change lives. So, let me end my speech by encouraging all of us to, in tandem, continue throwing our pebbles into the water! Different colours; different sizes but the same effect – ripples that touch young lives positively.

Thank you.