

**OPENING ADDRESS BY MR S ISWARAN, MINISTER,
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, SECOND MINISTER FOR
HOME AFFAIRS AND TRADE & INDUSTRY, AT THE
ORANGE RIBBON CELEBRATIONS – RACE AGAINST
RACISM 2014 ON SATURDAY, 16 AUG 2014, AT 1745 HRS
AT MARINA BAY SANDS, EVENT PLAZA**

Dr Teo Ho Pin, Mayor of North West District,

Mr Zainudin Nordin, Chairman of OnePeople.sg,

Presidents and CEOs of the self-help groups,

Mr Lim Chin, CEO of S League,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentleman,

Introduction

1. I am very happy to join you this evening for the Orange Ribbon Run and Walk. And, I am especially glad to see thousands of you here today, united in your pledge to support this important cause against racism.

Racial Harmony in Singapore

2. Last month, a United Nations Development Report¹ praised Singapore for our social and racial harmony and cohesion. Yet, fifty years ago, if we had told our pioneer generation of Singaporeans that Singapore would one day receive such recognition, they would have been very surprised, even relieved. Because, we had our fair share of racial turmoil and conflict in our early days of independence. We overcame it, through strong leadership, good policies, and, most importantly, the indomitable spirit of Singaporeans, like you and me, who chose to reject prejudice and embrace our religious and cultural diversity. The peace and stability that we have today, is founded on the harmonious ties that have been painstakingly built over the past five decades. It is something that every Singaporean can be proud of.

¹ Mr Khalid Malik, Director of the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme, told The Straits Times that Singapore has done well to progress from a Third-World nation to a First-World one in a short span of time. "What I also see is very positive is (that) Singapore has managed to bring many groups and races together into a cohesive sense of being a Singaporean."

3. But we must never make the mistake of being complacent and thinking that we have arrived. The world has many examples of societies that have been torn apart by racial and religious conflict, after many years, even decades and centuries, of stability. Racial harmony is a work in progress; every generation has to preserve and build on it in the face of new challenges. And, it is now up to a younger generation of Singaporeans to carry the torch handed to us by our pioneers.

4. In today's Singapore, there are diverse opinions and views which are passionately held by different segments of our society. Social media and cyberspace amplify these voices. As we engage each other across these different viewpoints, we must always be civil, maintain mutual respect, and be resolute in our stand against any form of prejudice. The many moderate voices amongst us must stand up and be counted, in the real world and in cyberspace, to deter extreme behavior. And there are many ways that the community at large can do its part. For a start, we can take an active role in discouraging hate speech or insensitive racial comments, which may surface in the online space from time to time. It may be as straightforward as speaking up against such insensitive acts and comments, or not liking or populating such a post. One Singapore is about being united in our stand against racism and other forms of prejudice, no matter what our different viewpoints are.

The Orange Ribbon Movement

5. This Orange Ribbon Run and Walk led by One People.sg is a great example of a ground-up community effort. The orange ribbon symbol and the “Race against Racism” walk, remind us of the need to preserve racial harmony and stay committed to the cause. Various community partners, religious, grassroots and self-help groups as well as corporations have joined in to support this effort. I am especially happy to know that youth support for the cause is strong and growing, with this year’s youth participation more than double that of last year’s. More than 1,000 students from secondary to post-secondary institutions have come forward to participate in this event. Among us are also youth volunteers and beneficiaries from the Bedok Youth Society for the Disabled, as well as our young soccer players from the Football Association of Singapore, and the S.League Club.

Supporting acts against racism

6. Recognising the changes in our society, OnePeople.sg has also strengthened its outreach efforts to promote racial harmony. This year, its recent joint study with the Institute of Policy Studies - “Indicators of Racial and Religious Harmony” - found that one in two respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were interested to understand the customs and practices of other racial groups. In response, OnePeople.sg will focus on nurturing cross-cultural friendships. Starting with our children, the Ministry of Education and OnePeople.sg have given an Orange Ribbon kit to each Primary 4 student as part of the Racial Harmony Celebrations in schools. Students make their own Orange Ribbon and pass it on to a school mate from a different culture, with a personalised card, as a gesture of friendship. This year, OnePeople.sg has added a new multi-ethnic group category in the Orange Ribbon Run, where friends and acquaintances of different races are encouraged to run together in the spirit of the cause.

7. I congratulate OnePeople.sg and its partners on these commendable efforts, and I am glad that it has received such a warm response.

Conclusion

8. The mark of true harmony is mutual respect, deep friendships, and an abiding commitment to discuss and resolve our differences in a civil, mature and respectful manner. As you walk together this evening, I hope you will take the opportunity to reflect on our shared values, contemplate the friends you have from different ethnic or religious backgrounds, resolve to form more of such friendships, and strengthen our racial harmony in the journey that lies ahead. Thank you.