

OPENING ADDRESS BY MR GERALD SINGHAM, VICE-CHARIMAN, ONEPEOPLE.SG AT HARMONYWORKS! CONFERENCE 2010 ON SATURDAY 10 JULY AT NANYANG POLYTECHNIC

Good Morning

My fellow Board Members

Members of the Inter-Religious Harmony Circle

Distinguished Guests

Students

I would like to warmly welcome you to today's Conference. OnePeople first came up with the idea of an annual Conference to engage youths on race relations back in 2005. As an organisation championing racial harmony, we feel it is important to hear what our younger generation has to say about issues of race and religion. We want to give a voice to our youths, to share what they feel, and contribute to discussions on issues which have important implications for our country. We believe that as youths, you now carry the baton in shaping our peace and harmony as future flag bearers of this country, and your views matter. In this spirit, we introduced this Conference and called it HarmonyWorks! to send a simple but very important message; Harmony does Work!

2 Today's Conference marks the Launch of the Orange Ribbon Celebrations. The Orange Ribbon is a movement to uphold values of respect and trust in our community. The colour Orange was chosen as it represents harmony and brotherhood. Back then, when I was a district councilor at Central Singapore Community Development Council, my team and I created this symbol; the Orange Ribbon, to spread the values of harmony and trust. Each year, during the month of July, we encourage as many people to wear the Orange Ribbon to show our unwavering support to racial and religious harmony. We celebrate the occasion with a month long multicultural activities. I am proud to say that the Orange Ribbon Celebrations which started off as district level project has now grown to a national movement.

3 We are now are a growing population. Singapore targets a population of 6.5 million in year 2030. Last year, our population was close to 5 million with 1.5 million as foreigners or Permanent Residents. Our demographic landscape is changing. We now have people from China, India, as well as friends from our Asian and Western parts of the world taking roots in our country. I am sure you

do see this change happening in your schools and where you live.

Now, what does this diversity mean to all of us?

4 Diversity does bring forth challenges. You may be a local Chinese but you may not speak the same language as your foreign friend from China. Our Singaporean way of life, may be far different from your classmates from different parts of the world. Some feel foreigners have come here to take away our jobs, others feel new citizens are crowding us out. It can get a lot worse. I am sure you have read about the recent case of students from a certain college who went on Wikipedia to brand their schoolmates from different backgrounds as “dogs”. The incident has since been addressed by the school and the matter is laid to rest.

5 Some see diversity as a threat. But the truth is far more the opposite. Let me give you an example which is close to our hearts, at least for the boys. I am referring to the World Cup. Do you know Germany has players from Turkish, Spanish, Brazilian, Bosnian, and Tunisian origin? Five of them hold dual passports being born outside of their country. Their two ace players, Podolski and Klose are Polish.

Jerome Boateng is of Ghanian descent, he plays for Germany while his brother Kevin plays for Ghana. Now, most of you may have seen how Germany played in this World Cup. It is no longer the team which uses physical defensive play to counter their opponents. This German team is now far more refreshing with their new attacking style and forward onslaughts. What is their secret? The German team boasts that their multicultural players bring new skills and techniques and add a completely different dimension to German football, making it slick.

6 Just like football, our country also needs talent. We need talents to raise standards, build new industries and strengthen Singapore's economy. Besides our locals, the government invests in bringing foreign talents to our country to help us move forward. The idea is for our foreign talents to bring about new opportunities and business ventures and as a result create more jobs for locals. My law firm deals with a foreign company who in doing their business actually provides job opportunities for Singaporeans.

7 New citizens also bring their cultures along making our home a vibrant global city. Food is a great example. If you look at Singapore, now you have a wider choice of eateries, from Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Burmese, European and much more delicacies to choose from. Besides food, the cultures and traditions of our new citizens add colour and makes Singapore a much more exciting city to live in.

8 People come to Singapore for a reason. They believe in the potential of Singapore to offer greener pastures for themselves and their families. They feel it is a safe and peaceful environment to bring up their children, a good place to do business or work, and they believe in our progress as a nation. Some decide to live here and become new citizens. It is not easy moving from your home country to another foreign place. For our new citizens who call our country home, it is a whole new world. They too are looking for some comfort, care and help so they can settle better in our country. They too wish to make new friends so that they don't feel like strangers in a strange land.

9 As Singaporeans, we need to play our part by being warm hosts. We need to build relationships and make our new citizens feel at home. Integration is a two-way street. Our new arrivals, must also take the time to understand the Singaporean way of life and make their best attempts to adapt. In order to integrate, we need to have open minds and open hearts. Over time, just like our forefathers did, I am confident we will be able to appreciate each other better, and see each other not as “us and them”, but as one people.

10 Today’s Conference aims to discuss the topic of integration with the theme; “how will you embrace diversity?”. Our Guest Speaker, Prof Mark Featherstone will share with you his perspectives. He is an excellent role model of one who has integrated well with our community. As a Canadian having lived and worked here for some time, I am sure his life journey will provide us with some good learning lessons on embracing diversity. There will be breakout discussions for you to speak your mind. Later in the day you will also have the opportunity to engage our Guest of Honour, Senior Minister Grace Fu, who sits in the National Integration Council. A rich and dynamic Conference awaits you. I hope you will take this opportunity

to express your thoughts, meet new friends, and learn something valuable from the Conference proceedings.

11 I would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners Nanyang Polytechnic and Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) for their staunch support towards the Conference. I would also like to thank members of the Inter-Religious Harmony Circle as well as our youth facilitators who have come forward to facilitate the breakout sessions. In addition, I would like to thank the National Integration Council, Lee Foundation, Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, What's Up, 77th Street and Frolick for their donations and kind contributions. Last but not least, I would like to thank each and everyone of you for coming on board this Conference.

I wish you a meaningful day ahead.

Thank you.