

**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG FOR THE LAUNCH
OF OnePeople.sg IN CONJUNCTION WITH CDC 10th ANNIVERSARY
ON SUNDAY, 27 MAY 2007**

Mayors,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to join all of you this afternoon to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Community Development Councils (CDCs).

10 YEARS OF CDC ACHIEVEMENTS

When they were first established in 1997, the CDC's primary task was to strengthen Singapore's social fabric. Since then, the CDCs have evolved their role in response to changing needs, and developed into pivotal community-based organisations.

In assisting the needy, the CDCs have become a focal point for residents to access a whole range of social services such as Workfare, employment services and public assistance. The CDCs keep our social welfare system responsive to the needs of residents, and deliver services efficiently yet without losing the human touch.

To strengthen community bonding, the CDCs have initiated and implemented many programmes and activities, so that their residents can always look forward to something fresh and innovative. The CDCs have also leveraged on a strong and broad-based network to serve the community. In the last year alone, CDCs worked with over 300 community partners, including grassroots organisations, schools, and VWOs, to reach out more effectively to residents. At the same time, the CDCs mobilised 3,000 volunteers to look after their own community needs, and contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Apart from social services and community bonding, the CDCs have also been responsive in addressing national concerns. During the SARS crisis, for example, the CDCs helped to administer the Home Quarantine Order, organised awareness and education activities, and worked closely with the grassroots organisations to help residents cope with the outbreak. After 9/11 and the terrorist alert in Singapore, the CDCs stepped up efforts to promote racial harmony, and to strengthen trust and understanding among our different ethnic groups.

Over the last decade, the CDCs have made good progress. As an experiment in local administration, the CDCs have shown that when a community is given the authority and responsibility to look after its own well-being, it will produce better results than when affairs are managed centrally by a distant bureaucracy. When Singaporeans know that their own community's well being depends on what they themselves do, they will step forward to contribute their time, energy and money. This spirit of community help and mutual support is what keeps us together as a strong and cohesive Singapore family.

IMPORTANCE OF RACIAL HARMONY

Looking ahead, I would like to see the CDCs play an even greater role in cultivating a more cohesive and harmonious community.

One of the most important challenges for the CDCs is to strengthen racial harmony and community confidence. As a multi-racial and multi-religious society, we must always be conscious of the need to foster a sense of fairness and trust among the various races and religions. We are fortunate in Singapore to enjoy strong inter-racial understanding and harmony. But it would be a grievous mistake to take this for granted. As an open society, we are constantly exposed to external influences that can stress our social fabric. And like many other countries, we face the threat of terrorists who seek to destabilise our

society. An attack can severely damage the harmonious ethnic relations that underpin our existence as a nation. This is why we must step up our efforts in multiracial integration, and not just leave things as they are.

The Government is committed to keeping Singapore a safe and harmonious society. We will uphold meritocracy and provide opportunities for all to realize their full potential in life. We will ensure that the minority communities have the space to keep their heritages alive, and not feel pressured by the majority Chinese community. We will integrate our population in housing estates, and protect the common spaces in our schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces, so that Singaporeans have ample opportunity to grow up together, live together and play together.

However, the Government alone cannot keep our society strong and united. This can only come about if we each do our part, as we go about our daily lives, making the efforts to get to know each other better, and developing a sense of comfort with one another. Small things like being sensitive to each other's needs, bringing one another into our conversations, extending a hand, or having a meal together, will make a difference and leave a lasting impression. It is this quiet, instinctive sensitivity to each other that ensures that our social fabric remains strong and vibrant, that we maintain peace and harmony in Singapore amidst a turbulent world.

Our community and religious organisations understand that preserving the trust and understanding among our different ethnic groups requires constant care and attention. For example, every year, the Singapore Buddhist Lodge, Hindu Endowment Board and Jamiyah come together to provide educational bursaries for more than 1,000 students from low income families regardless of their race or religion. The Joint Social Service Centre (JSSC), which was formed by Central Singapore CDC and the five self-help groups to provide social services to needy

families, has also developed many racial harmony programmes for our young, so that they imbibe the right values of multiracialism at an early age.

ONEPEOPLE.SG

To promote racial harmony well, the JSSC needs to focus its efforts. The CDCs have discussed this with the self-help groups, and decided to pool their resources and be more active in working together to strengthen racial harmony. The JSSC will thus be revamped into a new organisation involving all five CDCs, and the five self-help groups. It will be called OnePeople.sg, reflecting its mission to bring Singaporeans together as one people, regardless of race, language or religion.

OnePeople will champion racial harmony in our communities by initiating new activities, and fostering interaction between the different races and religions. It will also raise awareness of other cultures, help people to be more sensitive and understanding when they interact with others, and serve as a one-stop resource centre for information on inter-racial and inter-faith issues.

It is appropriate that OnePeople is being launched on this 10th anniversary of the CDC. It marks a milestone in the development of the CDCs, and represents how the CDCs will be working with community organisations to promote racial and religious harmony. I am pleased to announce that Mayor Zainudin Nordin will chair the first Management Committee of OnePeople, and look forward to the initiatives that he and his team will be rolling out in the coming months.

CONCLUSION

Finally, let me thank all the volunteers who have given your unstinting support and commitment to the CDCs over the years. You have given generously of your time and effort to organise events, befriend and care for the

less fortunate, and lend a hand at CDC activities. Because of your contributions, the CDCs have succeeded in doing much good work for the community, and improving the lives of many residents. I wish you the very best as we continue to work together to strengthen our community bonds, and build a more cohesive and harmonious Singapore.
