

**Speech by Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien
Senior Minister of State
Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and
Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources
and National Community Leadership Institute (NACLI) Board Chairperson
at Memorandum of Understanding Signing Ceremony
Between SIM University (UniSIM) and People's Association (PA)
@ NACLI on 18 February 2012**

Professor Cham Tao Soon
Chairman of SIM University Board of Trustees

Professor Cheong Hee Kiat
President of SIM University

Mr Yam Ah Mee
Chief Executive Director of the People's Association

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you. I am delighted to join all of you today at this Memorandum of Understanding Signing Ceremony. We will see a new partnership between UniSIM and NACLI - the leadership development arm of the PA to offer a new Master's degree programme in community leadership and social development. This programme will impart the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to rapid social changes in our society and the world. It will offer systematic professional training for those engaged in work related to community leadership and social development. They include policy makers, community leaders, civil society actors, social workers, counsellors and unionists.

An Inclusive and Cohesive Society

2 In the Presidential Address at the Opening of the Singapore's 12th Parliament, President Tony Tan called on all Singaporeans to do their part to work with one another to shape our nation's future. He said that our shared goal is to create a better life for all. We want every Singaporean worker to hold a skilled,

well-paid job; every family to live in an affordable, comfortable home; every young person to develop himself fully and pursue his dreams; every senior citizen to stay active and to live with dignity. In short, to achieve the goal of an inclusive and cohesive society that leaves no one behind.

3 Will we be able to achieve this goal? Some believe that we are at our crossroads in a society facing increasing diversities and numerous challenges.

Three Key Challenges

4 Singapore, like other major countries in the world, is faced with challenges in our next phase of nation-building effort. I would like to focus on three of these challenges today. Firstly, our population is ageing. Today, one in 10 Singaporeans are aged 65 and above. By 2030, it will be one in five Singaporeans. We will need more programmes, services and facilities to keep our seniors active, employed and healthy. This is something that the Ministerial Committee on Ageing is looking into. However, this is not something the Government can do alone.

5 While the family unit has been providing the most important support, we will need the participation of all stakeholders as well. Community leaders in the PA's Grassroots Organisations, voluntary and civic groups have played a role in helping to make the lives of our seniors more meaningful.

6 One such good example is Ms Judy Koh, Vice-Chairperson of the Radin Mas Wellness Programme. She plays a key role in encouraging the seniors to stay socially and physically engaged through building social networks in the community. She encouraged a group of seniors to start a herb garden in her housing estate. She also ensures continuity by grooming the more capable and passionate ones to take on leadership roles. Her efforts have not only allowed these seniors to lead meaningful lives but have also created strong social bonding

and emotional support for them. Under her guidance, these seniors have since embarked on a fruits garden as well. Why do we need local leaders like Judy? Because she is in the best position to know what the seniors in Radin Mas like and what will “click” for them. We will need more volunteers like Ms Judy with the passion and the leadership skills, and the local knowledge to address the needs of seniors.

7 The second challenge is that our society is more diverse and will be increasingly so. We now have more groups, each with their own different needs, interests and concerns – the young and the old; the high income, middle income and the low income; the locals, and the immigrants; special interest groups in addition to our inherent racial and religious groupings. The diversity makes Singapore a unique melting pot of cultures and heritage but it can only be so if our social fabric is strong.

8 There are emerging trends that tug at our social fabric. The internet and social media are now easily accessible through multi-platforms such as smart phones, e-readers, tablets, laptops and computers. A moment of unhappiness or annoyance can be translated into an instant post or photo on-line which unfortunately cannot be retrieved when calmness returns. Technology has enabled like-minded people to easily and quickly link up and mobilised for a common cause. Social media has amplified voices beyond what was attainable in the traditional media. And in an arena that is noisy, some attempted to be more extreme and assertive to be heard, at times to an extent that was uncomfortable for the majority. We therefore must adapt and learn to manage greater diversity in perspectives, values systems and aspirations.

9 This challenge of increasing social diversity is likely to become greater as our society evolves. This means that the task of bonding and bridging all these groups will become even more important. PA and its wide network of about 32,000 grassroots leaders, will have their work cut out for them in the years ahead.

PA strives to build greater social capital using the All C.A.R.E. framework; that is, to use available Channels to bring residents of all Races, Ages and Estates (housing types) together. Our diversity, if managed well, can be turned into an asset as it will strengthen our resilience as a nation. To do so, we will need to build the capability in the field of community leadership and social development and equip our community leaders and PA staff with more knowledge and practical skills to navigate the increasingly complex landscape.

10 The third key challenge in our community building effort is about connecting youths and the community. Our youths are our future. The future of Singapore and our own future will depend on them. We need to continue tapping on the energy, idealism and aspirations of our youths and engage them early so that they can play the crucial role in creating and sustaining the Singapore we all aspire to have.

11 Currently, there are nearly 6,000 youths serving as grassroots leaders, excluding the thousands more who serve as volunteers and project leaders. Young professionals such as Ms Regina Chong, Assistant Vice-President of a financial service firm, is a good example of a working young professional who contributes her time at Kreta Ayer-Kim Seng constituency and provides key leadership support for the youths, despite her busy schedule.

12 Ms Regina Chong has spearheaded various community programmes including “Sports in the Heartlands”, a sustainable community programme to reach out to about 500 children from needy families and youths-at-risk. The programme has helped channel the youths’ energies to constructive pursuits; build the youths’ confidence, instil discipline and team spirit in them. It has also broadened their social networks. Some of these youths who have participated in these community programmes have since been inducted to serve in committees and are now contributing to the community.

13 We need to continue to engage our youths, build up their community spirit – this is necessary if we want to continue to have a vibrant and caring Singapore that we can all be proud of. All this must be done despite the fact that youths are in the most exciting part of their lives as they transit from school life, to National Service for some, to starting and establishing careers, to getting married, to establishing their own homes and to having children – not necessarily in this order. How then do we engage them in community building through the different phases of their lives? Once again, I believe, part of the answer lies in leveraging on the latest research-based community leadership and social development theories coupled with the practical experiences of dedicated people who serve our community.

Active Citizenry

14 These are the three key challenges ahead. How can we overcome them and achieve our goal of an inclusive and cohesive society? The answer lies with us Singaporeans. We need to be active citizens, excited about shaping the future of Singapore; participating actively in making Singapore better; emotionally engaged, and championing the causes which we believe will be the right ones for the future of Singapore.

15 There is more active citizenry today than in the past. More people are doing volunteer work. In a study done by the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre in 2010, it found that volunteerism rate in Singapore has more than doubled from a low of 9% in the year 2000 to 23% in 2010. While in the past where civic activism tended to be along religious and racial lines, today we have more civic groups championing for causes such as the environment, animal welfare, arts and culture and sports.

16 With greater active citizenry all across, there is a need to build greater leadership capacity and expertise. We need well-trained leaders in grassroots

bodies, non-profit organisations, voluntary welfare organisations as well as in government agencies that are increasing their community outreach and engagement programmes. These organisations need to garner the support and participation of our people and will benefit from the knowledge and skills of community leadership and social development.

17 Hence, there could not be a more appropriate time for a new graduate programme in community leadership and social development to effectively respond to these growing needs. It is a critical component in the social infrastructure that supports our journey towards an inclusive and cohesive society. Can we reach our goals of an inclusive society, vibrant economy and constructive politics given the social challenges? Well, this is not a question of whether we can or cannot as failure to do so is not an option. Over the last 47 years, we have shown that the effort of carefully cultivating a strong multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural society has given us the Singapore “harmony dividend”. Our people have seen the benefits of being a one united people. Our unity, community spirit and resilience have carried us through the many adversities confronting us. It has helped us attract many foreign investors which created many jobs for Singaporeans. But what is clear in the last 47 years is that the Government did not do it alone and could not have done it alone. The Government cannot do it alone in the future. All of us Singaporeans play a critical role in creating the society we want. I encourage all stakeholders to join us in promoting community leadership and social development.

18 In closing, I like to congratulate UniSIM and PA for the collaboration to offer this unique Master’s programme for Community Leadership and Social Development. NACLI will continue to make its courses more relevant to community leaders to support the national objectives.

19 Thank you.
