

# **SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG AT MAYORS' SWEARING-IN CEREMONY, 20 JUNE 2014**

Mr Lim Swee Say

Deputy Chairman of People's Association

Mayors

District Councillors

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

## **Introduction**

I am very happy to join you this afternoon for the Mayors' swearing-in ceremony. I would like to congratulate the Mayors Dr Teo Ho Pin, Mr Teo Ser Luck and Dr Maliki Osman on their reappointments, and also welcome Ms Low Yen Ling as Mayor for South West District and Ms Denise Phua as Mayor for Central Singapore District, which is our district and where we are now. I would also like to thank Mr Sam Tan and Dr Amy Khor for their outstanding work and leadership as Mayors for the Central Singapore and South West Districts. Dr Khor has also done an excellent job as the Chairperson of the Mayors' Committee, and she is now handing over to Dr Teo Ho Pin. I am confident that Dr Teo will be a worthy successor as Chairman.

I would also like to thank all the Councillors, some of whom are here today for the ceremony. All of you are volunteers, and some of you hold full-time jobs. You have served with commitment and passion, supported the CDCs and the Mayors unstintingly, and helped to improve the lives of the residents. So to you all, a big "Thank you"!

## **CDCs' Mission**

The purpose of the CDCs is to build an inclusive society and to strengthen our community bonds. And the CDCs define their mission in three ways: ABC – Assisting the Needy; Bonding the People; and Connecting the Community.

The CDCs have fulfilled these roles well. You have designed and implemented your own programmes to serve the needy, and responded quickly to local needs. You have introduced activities to bring together residents of all races and ages, strengthening racial harmony, promoting active ageing, enhancing emergency preparedness, and so on. And you have been able to mobilise the wider community

– the private sector, schools, VWOs, volunteers – in order to serve residents and to strengthen our social ties and resilience.

There are many good programmes which the CDCs have conceived, initiated, implemented. For example, South West CDC has programmes called Adopt-A-Rental Block and Adopt-A-Precinct. The volunteers help needy families by donating money, buying food, painting the flat, and so on, and this has benefitted more than 3,000 households in the South West. In the North West, there is a SwimSafer Club for Seniors. It was started by one passionate senior, who voluntarily coached elderly swimmers for many years. The North West CDC saw the benefits of swimming to elders, and expanded the programme to more than 150 seniors. In South East, we have a Neighbours for Active Living Programme, which is done in partnership with Eastern Health Alliance, grassroots organisations and social services organisations. The aim is to reduce the re-admission rates of the vulnerable elderly into hospitals, and specifically, into Changi General Hospital. The Eastern Health Alliance has Professional Community Care Team which visits the elderly regularly, and the students from neighbouring schools and neighbours as well are mobilised to check in on these vulnerable elderly people from time to time, to make sure that they are well, to make sure that they have got friends, somebody to talk to. These are all good jobs well done.

### **Future of CDCs**

Today, the CDCs’ “ABC” mission remains relevant, because the needy continue to need help, as our extended family ties weaken, and as more elders live alone or live only with their spouses who are also elderly. Our social bonds need more tending, as Singaporeans lead busier and more private lives, and have more diverse interests. And our community involvement must also deepen to complement individual effort and the Government’s support for social needs in our new phase of development.

The Government is focussed on improving people’s lives. We are significantly strengthening our social safety nets, for example, through MediShield-Life or the Pioneer Generation Package. We are enhancing social cohesion between different ethnic groups, and integrating new arrivals into our society. And we are engaging the community in shaping our future together, through the OSC – Our Singapore Conversation, through MediShield-Life, through the Ubin Project.

On the ground, one way we are implementing policies better is through our Social Service Offices (SSOs). The CDCs’ work to assist the needy has shown how useful it is to be close to the ground. So now we are setting up the SSOs – 20 Social Service Offices, and this will bring us even closer to Singaporeans. The SSOs will administer social assistance to needy families; will help Singaporeans to navigate

through the “kueh lapis” of Government assistance programmes, layer by layer; and will partner the community to improve how we plan and deliver social assistance.

Meanwhile, of course, the CDCs continue to play important roles in these respects. First, you should help to build up the SSOs, because your original five Social Assistance Units in the CDCs have also now been converted into SSOs. You should use your knowledge and your networks to help the SSOs to start off on the right footing, to strike the right balance between administrative efficiency and personal touch, because the SSOs’ success is also your success. At the same time, the CDCs should run local programmes to complement the SSOs, go beyond social assistance to promote social mobility and to encourage self-help in the community, and to work with other government agencies to identify emerging needs and issues. And you should marshal resources in the wider community – private sector, VWOs, volunteers – to serve Singaporeans. The Government cannot do everything; it should not do everything. The Community too, we individuals, we have to support one another. And the CDCs hence should do more to involve the private sector, by championing Corporate Social Responsibility or encouraging companies to adopt local causes or partner VWOs. CDCs should promote volunteerism and a spirit of giving back, especially among those who have done well.

I am cheered that CDCs are already partnering SSOs closely. For example, Central Singapore CDC has a CatchPlus Programme, which is done together with the Kreta-Ayer grassroots organisations and the Kreta Ayer SSO. The CatchPlus Programme helps children from vulnerable families through mentoring, tuition, and enrichment classes. The SSOs refer residents with children who need help to the CDC, and the CDC partners the SSO, brings in the grassroots organisations, brings in the private sector to raise funds and organise activities for the children. And North East CDC also has a similar Mentoring Programme, which complements financial assistance by the Government by promoting social mobility. It assigns community mentors to lower-income students, to guide students and encourage them to aim high. It is presently running in one school – East View Primary School, but the CDC will extend this to more students and volunteers in the North East District.

### **Mayors' Roles**

Mayors play key leading roles in the CDCs. You have to motivate your councillors, grassroots leaders and volunteers, encourage new ideas to help the community, and most importantly, serve the people with your heart.

So I urge Mayors to use the next few years well. Lead the CDCs to meet changing needs. Always remember the basic ABCs: Assist the needy, Bond the people and Connect the community, and at the same time, continue to explore new ways to work with and serve a changing population.

## **Conclusion**

CDCs have existed now for 17 years, and they have become valued participants in the community. So I am quite confident that you will continue to contribute to your Districts and to Singapore, and help us to build a cohesive and compassionate nation. So congratulations and thank you very much.