

**SPEECH BY 1<sup>st</sup> ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL,  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FINANCE  
MR HENG SWEE KEAT**

**AT THE PAP SENIORS GROUP'S CELEBRATION  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS (IDOP)**

**ON SUNDAY 13 OCTOBER 2019, 3.30PM AT HOTEL MIRAMAR**

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Mr Tan Chuan-Jin  
Chairman, PAP Seniors Group

Comrades

**Introduction**

I am delighted to join you today for the Seniors Group's inaugural celebration of the International Day of Older Persons.

This occasion is marked by the United Nations every year, and the theme for 2019 is "The Journey to Age Equality".

It is a call for all countries to ensure that their societies remain inclusive for seniors, and that older people are able to participate equally and fully in society.

In Singapore, as in many Asian cultures, respect, care and honour for our elders has always been a central tenet, because we recognise that without the toil and sacrifice of earlier generations, we would not be where we are today

Indeed, when then-Minister Mentor Lee and Senior Minister Goh stepped down from the Cabinet in 2011, they reminded us in their joint statement that:

“The younger team must always have in mind the interests of the older generation. This generation who has contributed to Singapore must be well-looked after”.<sup>1</sup>

As someone who had witnessed first-hand the sacrifices that Mr Lee made for Singapore, and as a rookie MP who entered politics the year they stepped down from the Cabinet – I was particularly moved by this charge to the younger generation

It has stayed with me, and continues to guide me

### **Aspirations of Our Seniors**

What does it mean to “have in mind the interests of the older generation”?

Today, there are more than 500,000 Singaporeans above the age of 65<sup>2</sup>, or about 15% of our population

They are a diverse group of individuals, with different needs, interests, and aspirations – but what is common is a desire to live a life of purpose and dignity.

For some, this means staying active in the workplace. They want to continue working as long as they are able, and appreciate flexible employment opportunities that allow them to both make use of their experience, and acquire new skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Joint statement by SM Goh Chok Tong and MM Lee Kuan Yew, 14 May 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Statistics, “Population Trends 2018”

For others, they find meaning and purpose by dedicating time to goals and pursuits that they did not have when they were working – for instance, travelling, or running a marathon.

Still others stay closer to home, spending time with friends and family, caring for loved ones, or volunteering in the community.

The Government wants to be able to support our seniors in their diverse aspirations. We have, and will continue to, listen to diverse views, adjust our policies to meet the needs and aspirations of our seniors, and work together with our people to implement them well

### **Important role of PAP.SG**

In particular, my ministerial colleagues and I pay close attention to the work of the Seniors Group, which is carefully considered, and firmly grounded on our seniors' varied needs and aspirations

This has been the case since the formation of Seniors Group in 2013

a. Your first chairperson, our current President Madam Halimah Yacob

Established a strong foundation for Seniors Group in all three of its missions – championing causes, volunteerism, and connecting with senior activists

i. Under her leadership, Seniors Group activists not only submitted a variety of position papers that shaped Government policy, but also helped to gather valuable feedback on key policies such as MediShield Life

b. Your current Chairperson, Chuan Jin, has built on these strong foundations

Chuan Jin brought in expert views to sharpen the perspectives of PAP.SG

He has deepened our Party's interaction with our activists. I hear that his quarterly gatherings have since doubled in size

He also encourages our activists to meaningfully give back to society

Under his leadership, he brought PAP.SG to another level

### ***Champions of our seniors***

One excellent example of how the Seniors Group has championed the causes of our seniors is your recent Position Paper, “Empowering us to live with Purpose and Dignity in our Senior Years”. This Paper was submitted to the Government in January, and was followed by a debate in Parliament the next month, on “Ageing with Purpose”

This Position Paper was the result of more than six months of extensive consultation with stakeholders, including:

Seniors from different walks of life

Experts in healthcare and ageing

And canvassing views online

Because of the extensive and detailed conversations

This Paper articulated a compelling vision for Singapore to be one of the best places in the world to age in place

It reflected a deep understanding of seniors' needs and aspirations to staying active both in and outside of the workplace

Seniors Group was therefore able to present a coherent and realistic set of suggestions on how to get from where we are today, to that vision

To all of you who were involved in putting together this Paper -- thank you for all your hard work and effort!

Many of the suggestions from the Position Paper have become Government policy, and are benefitting seniors today. For instance:

Your suggestion to raise the CPF contribution rates for older workers beyond 55 was one of PM's key announcements at the recent National Day Rally.

Your call for more purpose-built senior housing like Kampung Admiralty led to Lawrence's announcement last month of the Yew Tee Integrated Development.

### ***Volunteerism and Engagement***

Indeed, the consultation for the Position Paper is just one of Seniors Group's many ongoing efforts to engage stakeholders and the community

This brings me to the second mission of Seniors Group – to promote volunteerism and active contribution to the community. The Seniors Group takes an active, hands-on approach to caring for our seniors

With the help of a strong core of activists, you have set up a wide network of Seniors Group Chapters across Singapore, and built a dedicated team of volunteers to reach out to seniors.

Seniors Group has also worked closely with the PAP Community Foundation (PCF) to build Sparkle Cares Centres in housing estates, which provide accessible, affordable and high-quality day care and rehabilitation services to seniors.

Today, we have five Sparkle Care Centres island-wide, and more are in the works

Our PCF Sparkletots pre-schoolers also have the opportunity spend some time with seniors at day care centres, and learn from a young age the value of serving and caring for their elders.

These outreach and engagement efforts are key to building our future Singapore together

I encourage Seniors Group to continue your efforts in staying close to the ground, and partnering with Singaporeans to deliver real improvements to the lives of our seniors

I am glad that Seniors Group has developed a handbook of all the relevant social schemes as a useful resource for when you engage seniors

Chuan Jin spoke about this earlier

Well done to Leng Leng and all those who were involved in its development!

I also hope that Seniors Group can help explain recent policy announcements to our seniors and listen to their feedback

For example, the Prime Minister recently announced the raising of retirement and re-employment ages, as well as a gradual increase in CPF contribution rates for our seniors.

I hope that Seniors Group can explain these changes to our seniors, both workers and business owners, and provide us with the feedback that you receive on these major policy moves.

This will go far to help my 4G colleagues and me develop better policies and explain them better.

This is how we can help give more Singaporeans a stake in Singapore

By working sincerely with them, for them.

And enlisting their feedback and support for us to take Singapore forward

### ***Mentorship***

This approach of working with and staying close to the ground must continue to be passed down through generations of PAP activists

That is why the Seniors Group's third mission – of maintaining links with senior activists, and encouraging them to mentor the younger ones – is so critical

I thank the Seniors Group for taking the initiative over the years to honour the contributions of our senior activists, and to record their stories to educate and inspire the younger generation. For instance:

Thanks to the Senior Group, our longest-serving members now have lifetime membership in the Party

And in 2015, the Seniors Group published an anthology of 50 stories of our PAP pioneers who dedicated their lives to serve their fellow Singaporeans

I am also very thankful to all the senior activists who have taken the time to guide younger activists and show them the ropes

I learnt a lot from my mentors when I first entered politics in 2011, particularly to my team members in Tampines – Ms Irene Ng, Mr Mah Bow Tan and especially Mr Sim Boon Ann.

Boon Ann was my predecessor in Tampines Central, and after it was decided that he would hand over his ward to my care, he personally brought me along to walkabouts in Tampines, shared with me the characteristics of the ward, and the concerns and hopes of Tampines residents.

Boon Ann helped me to become acquainted with the constituency. And he also assured me that he was always one phone call away.

When I was taken ill in 2016, Boon Ann immediately reached out to Masagos to offer his assistance, even though he had already retired



He took turns with my team mates in Tampines to help at my weekly Meet-the-People sessions

This was a great relief to me during my recovery, to know that my residents were in good hands with Boon Ann around

I know from my experience with Boon Ann that the gift of a mentor is priceless

To Boon Ann, and the many other activists and MPs, past and present, who have gone the extra mile to nurture the next generation – thank you very much.

This spirit of mentorship that you embody, and your sense of commitment, are inspiring

I hope that other senior activists can make similar efforts to guide and assist younger members

You are living proof that even as one generation hands over to another, the contribution of the previous generation remains invaluable.

We must continue to work well as a team, within each generation, and across generations, to ensure that the PAP continues to grow from strength to strength, and that we become ever better at serving our residents.

### **Honouring the Legacy of Our Seniors**

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all past generations of Singaporeans.

They toiled and sacrificed to make Singapore into what it is today, and placed Singapore on a firmer footing for the future.

We have benefitted from their hard work, and must never forget their contributions.

We must honour our seniors with our care for them, just as they took care of us

The Government will do its part to make sure that our seniors can have peace of mind in their golden years, and continue to stay active and connected, and receive the care they need

The Seniors Group can play a part by continuing to engage seniors deeply, and champion their causes

And Singaporeans must continue to care for the elderly and vulnerable among us.

More than this, we must also honour our seniors by stewarding and improving upon what we inherited from them; to leave behind a better Singapore for our children and grandchildren.

This is the principle that has driven generations of PAP activists

This is the driving force that motivates my colleagues and me every day, even as we tackle the challenges of our generation –.

Comrades, just as earlier generations of PAP activists worked together with Singaporeans to bring Singapore from third world to first

Let us continue to partner Singaporeans on this journey towards a fairer, more inclusive, more caring and more prosperous Singapore.

Thank you.