

**SPEECH OF MRS. YU-FOO YEE SHOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR
MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, YOUTH AND SPORTS
AT THE POLICE WORKPLAN SEMINAR ON 12 APRIL 2007, 7.15
PM, AT HOME TEAM ACADEMY**

Mr Goh Liang Kwang,
Acting Commissioner of Police,
Community leaders,
Police officers,

Good evening

I am delighted to see so many of our community leaders here to dialogue on building community resilience. This issue is very important and I thank the Singapore Police Force for inviting me here tonight.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

2. We all know that acts of terror not only destroy lives and properties, but also the social cohesion and trust that have been built up over generations. We have seen and read reports on how other communities have responded towards acts of terrorism. Some turned against their neighbours and people who had lived amongst them. They live in fear and suspicion of one another.
3. Some of us have witnessed the racial riots of the sixties and experienced for ourselves how racial and religious differences can cause conflicts and even lead to bloodshed.
4. However, we have also witnessed cases where the community's response during a crisis made a difference. For example, life returned to normal in London within weeks of the 7/7 subway bombings. It helped that community leaders, especially religious leaders, closed ranks to show solidarity and condemn the acts. There was trust in the Government, and timely communication between the authorities and the people.
5. Beyond the immediate emergency response, the government can only do so much to mitigate the social and psychological impact of such an incident. Community leaders of private institutions, religion, grassroots, media and schools amongst others, play a key role in reaching out and calming the community. This can be critical towards restoring public confidence on the ground.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

6. Community resilience does not occur naturally. We have to work at it. Last year, PM launched the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) which aims to promote greater interaction, trust and resilience in the community. Tonight, I will be highlighting 3 strategies which we can adopt to build a more cohesive and understanding society. We need to:
 - a) Build closer ties and rapport within the community;
 - b) Establish communication channels;
 - c) Manage incidents through early intervention

a) Build closer ties and rapport within the community

7. Friendships cannot be built up overnight. Close ties come about from a high level of trust, which comes about from positive interactions over a long period of time – across racial and religious groups.

8 At the national level, we have the National Steering Committee on Racial and Religious Harmony, or the NSC, chaired by Minister for Community Development, Youth & Sports, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan. The NSC serves as a platform for interaction among the leaders of the key racial and religious communities. The Committee also provides guidance to the Inter-Racial Confidence Circles, or IRCCs.

9. At the ground level, we must continue to create opportunities for people to network so as to get to know one another better. The IRCCs are working hard to engage all the local ethnic and religious leaders in each constituency. The goal is to ensure that all the key leaders at the local level are represented in the IRCCs. Through meetings, activities and interactions, friendship and trust will be built up among the leaders in the IRCCs. This can then set the tone for IRCCs to promote understanding and appreciation of differences among the members of various ethnic and religious groups.

b) Establish communication channels

10. Immediately after a crisis, people seek information for re-assurance. Misinformation and rumours can easily spark off a chain of over-reaction and irrational behaviour.

11. Under the Community Engagement Programme, the Government will establish clear communication links with community and religious leaders. This will ensure that timely and accurate information is shared with key people in the community. In turn, the community and religious leaders can share this information with their members, to help allay their fears and re-assure members of the public. At the same time, community leaders can also help to gather feedback from the ground on their concerns. This information will be useful for the Government to plan communication strategies and public messages.

c) Manage communal incidents through early intervention

12. In the early stages of any crisis, such as a flu pandemic, terrorist incident, or natural disaster, authorities like the Police will naturally be heavily engaged. Community leaders can play an important role in helping to intervene when there are incidents with racial or religious overtones. For example, community leaders can help to mediate and resolve minor disputes or misunderstandings at the local level. This will help to free up Police resources, which would help the Police to deal with urgent and critical tasks. To help enable community leaders to perform this role, the Government has introduced various training programmes on mediation and conflict management, some of which are offered here at the Home Team Academy.

13. I encourage the community leaders to attend these courses to build up their capabilities now. Leaders can then help to engage and mediate incidents even during peace time. This will help to build up confidence and experience, which will come in useful during crises.

THE ROLE OF THE POLICE

14. The Police has always been a keen supporter of community partnership. Over the years, many projects have been introduced under the Community Safety & Security Programme (CSSP), Security Watch Groups (SWGs), Neighbourhood Watch Zones (NWZs). And more recently, the Corporate First Responder (CFRs) scheme. These programmes have become well-established, and are natural platforms on which the Police can support community initiatives in resilience building.

15. I strongly urge our community leaders to work closely with the Police to develop programmes to help the community develop resilience, and foster racial and religious harmony. Through jointly organised activities, the members of the community can get to know the Police officers better. Likewise, Police officers must be familiar with all the community leaders in their zones. They must be proactive, and actively engage the members of the community they serve. This way, bonds and trust will be built-up. And this will be invaluable in times of crisis.

Conclusion

16. In closing, let me reiterate that community resilience takes time to develop. It will not happen overnight. The harder we work at it during peace time, the better prepared we will be when we need it. It will take the combined efforts of the community and the Government agencies, such as the Police, to make this a success.

17. I wish you a fruitful discussion on how community resilience can be further developed.

Thank you.