

SPEECH BY MRS JOSEPHINE TEO, CHAIRMAN, PAP WOMEN'S WING AT THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION AT YWCA FORT CANNING LODGE ON 7 MARCH 2020 AT 2.30PM

1. Tomorrow is International Women's Day (IWD). This occasion should have been special for two reasons.
 - a. It is likely to be the last IWD before we hold the next GE.
 - b. It is the start of a new decade and so a good time for the Women's Wing (WW) to take stock, and to map out our vision for the future.
2. Therefore, right up to early February, we had been planning for a different kind of celebration.
 - a. None of us could have expected the Covid-19 outbreak.
 - b. However, in the true Singapore Spirit, the WW response is to be nimble and still come together to mark IWD in a meaningful way. Same same but different!
 - c. At another suitable time, possibly at our annual WW Conference to be held in the later part of the year, we will revisit the important topic of our plans for the future.
3. For today, I'm sure you will agree with me, it is appropriate to begin by thanking all our frontline staff.
 - a. We thank them in the same way as all Singaporeans.
 - b. But as an organisation of women for women, we want in particular to recognise the women on our frontlines – nurses and doctors, Home Team emergency services and border control officers, hotel housekeepers and

hawker centre cleaners. Even our teachers and educators have to exercise extra caution when taking care of our young ones.

- c. On the frontlines are all our sisters, mothers and daughters, who are working tirelessly to keep the Singapore family safe.
4. All these women, regardless of race and age, are a big part of the teams at the forefront of Singapore's battle against Covid-19.
 - a. This is why we welcome the Government's decision to show our appreciation and support in a tangible way, by awarding public officers on the frontline with a special bonus of up to one month.
 - b. I hope private sector employers will also find suitable ways to recognise these frontline warriors - both the women and men.
 5. At the same time, we know that some women have chosen to freelance, so that they can take better care of their families.
 - a. They could be financial planners, real estate agents, private tutors, wellness instructors, home-based personal care providers like beauticians and hair stylists.
 - b. They are their own employers, and yet in this period, their incomes could also be impacted by cancellations and postponements of bookings.
 6. This is why, on Tuesday, I announced a new Self-Employed Persons, or SEP Training Support Scheme to provide income relief to self-employed persons and freelancers, while helping them to be more future-ready.
 - a. Over the next three months, all self-employed persons and freelancers will be paid a training allowance of \$7.50 per hour or \$60 a day, when they attend

courses under the SkillsFuture Series, as well as selected training programmes in their occupations.

- b. There is no limit to how many days of training they can attend.
 - c. In this regard, I would like to thank the PAP's symbiotic partner NTUC for agreeing, at short notice, to administer the Scheme.
 - d. The Government has set aside \$36 million for it, and NTUC will announce details soon on how to apply.
7. During this period, I know that many women are helping in their own ways, such as making hand-sanitisers and sewing reusable masks. WW activists in Marine Parade and Kolam Ayer branches packed fruits for cleaners. Ms Joan Pereira told me that aunties in Tanjong Pagar are giving good advice to each other on how to eat well to build up our bodies' immunity. That is useful too!
8. The Government, NTUC and community are stepping in to help. So too should every one of us. In the spirit of SG Together and SG Cares, WW can show our appreciation to frontline workers, in particular, the cleaners who are helping to keep our housing estate safe from the virus. After all, how can we have SG Clean without their hard work?
9. I am therefore happy to announce that PAP Women's Wing, together with the PCF, has put together a special International Women's Day 2020 Care Pack for around 5,000 cleaners working in HDB towns all over Singapore.
10. The Care Pack consists of a thermometer, a pocket-sized bottle of hand sanitiser, insect repellent, medicated plasters and a \$30 shopping voucher. Our lovely children in PCF Sparkletots are also chipping in, by making a thank you card for each cleaner. These items will be distributed by our WW activists at all the branches by the end of

March. It's a small gesture, but it comes from the bottom of our hearts, to thank our Town cleaners for their extra work as part of the national movement to raise public hygiene standards.

11. Beyond support for Singaporeans to cope with the Covid-19 outbreak, this year's Budget also shows the Government's care and support for women, in particular older women. They go well beyond one-time gestures like cash payouts and grocery vouchers. Many schemes introduced by Government do in fact, benefit women more.
12. For instance, more than 65% of recipients of Silver Support are women who had low earnings throughout their lives. Similarly, in time to come, more of the benefits of the Pioneer Generation Package, Merdeka Generation Package and CareShield Life will be enjoyed by women.
13. The recently announced Matched Retirement Savings Scheme, or MRSS will also help Singaporeans aged 55 to 70 who have yet to meet the CPF Basic Retirement sum to save more for retirement. More than half of those eligible are women.
14. Many initiatives like free use of public gyms and pools for those aged 65 and above, CHAS enhancements and new nursing homes will help older women as we age – ourselves, our mothers and sisters, and everyone we as women have to care for.
15. Younger women are not forgotten either, especially those with families to support. Higher preschool and education subsidies, as well as a bigger push for flexible work arrangements, will help women juggle our many commitments.
16. All these add up to a lot of support by the Government to women in Singapore. How can we, as women, also support one and other, to make the best of the programmes that the Government has put in place? What more can we do to nudge one another

along, to walk the journey, and emerge stronger from every crisis that hits Singapore?

I would just like to put three “nudges” out there, as food for thought for all of us.

17. First, as Covid-19 has made so many companies realise that flexible work arrangements are actually quite doable, we should nudge employers to regularise these practices which will benefit everyone, not just women. This will be an increasingly important feature at the workplace, as our population ages and the world of work evolves.

18. Second, let us nudge each other to keep fit, upskill and reskill. Whether we are already in the workforce or have taken time out to care for our families, we should take advantage of the Mid-career Support Package and SEP Training Support Scheme to prepare ourselves for a longer career runway. At the same time, stay physically and mentally healthy.

19. Lastly, nudge our loved ones and community organisations to take advantage of the MRSS, so that we can boost retirement savings in old age.

20. Finally, let me say something about what to expect for GE.

21. Time and again, we see that women, as much as men, contribute to the well-being of our nation and have also made remarkable progress. Between 2009 and 2019,

- a. Our female resident employment rate for those aged 25 to 64 has improved significantly from 64% to 73%.
- b. More than half of females aged 25 to 64 now have at least tertiary-level education, rising from 37% to 55%.
- c. More women are in PMET occupations, rising from 49% to 57%.
- d. The median income (including employer CPF) of full-time employed females rose from about \$2,800 to \$4,300 in 2019.

- e. The adjusted gender pay gap has also narrowed to just 6% but I think we can do even better.

22. When it comes to women in leadership,

- a. we appointed our first female Permanent Secretary in 1999. Today, we have six serving women Permanent Secretaries.
- b. In our private sector, women now make up one-third of senior management positions in Singapore.
- c. But only 16% of the Board seats in SGX-listed companies are held by women and 9% of Singapore businesses have a female CEO.
- d. So, our job is not done!

23. There are now outstanding women in almost every field. Among women MPs,

- a. Minister Grace Fu, apart from being Leader of the House, is leading Singapore's effort for our hawker culture to be recognised by Unesco as an intangible cultural heritage.
- b. Minister Indranee, who will tell us more about the Budget later, is responsible for UPLIFT, the national movement to help children from disadvantage families reach their full potential.
- c. SMS Dr Amy Khor is our champion for a "Zero-waste Singapore". That rocks!
- d. SMS Sim Ann is the chief architect of the SG Youth Action Plan, that aims to empower the younger generation to shape our future.
- e. SPS Low Yen Ling is my right-hand-woman at MOM, taking charge of all women issues in MOM, such as promoting work-life harmony and looking after Foreign Domestic Workers and their employers.

- f. Mayor Denise Phua has transformed Central CDC, much like she helped to redraw the landscape for the special needs community.
 - g. SPS Sun Xueling, together with Dr Intan Azura, Ms Rahayu Mazam, Ms Cheng Li Hui and Ms Cheryl Chan advocated for more support towards young families, which PM responded to during last year's NDR.
 - h. On the ground and in their respective fields, MPs like Dr Lily Neo who has served nearly 25 years as an MP, Er Dr Lee Bee Wah, Ms Jessica Tan, Ms Tin Pei Lin, Ms Foo Mee Har, Dr Fatimah Lateef and Ms Joan Pereira, are all accomplished professionally and well-loved by their constituents.
24. Apart from making sure that women have equal opportunities in Singapore, the PAP has been committed to bringing more women into politics, so that we too can make a contribution in taking our nation forward. DPM Heng Swee Keat, when he spoke to WW activists at last year's WW conference, said this: *"Together, we must press on with breaking the barriers for women to take on leadership roles in all parts of society. I urge the Women's Wing to continue working with its partners, to push for greater advancement of women. Companies and the public sector must open the door for men and women to complement each other in leadership, and create better workplaces, stronger organisations and more robust ecosystems. These will in turn form a stronger foundation for us to take on future challenges together."* I believed we are all very encouraged by DPM's words.
25. As Chairperson of WW, I hope to see the pool of women PAP MPs grow in diversity. Compared to when I first entered Parliament in 2006, there are now more women MPs especially when we include the opposition and nominated MPs. I have every confidence that our presence in Parliament will continue to be felt.

- a. We have identified women candidates who have the passion to serve fellow Singaporeans, and have proven themselves in their chosen fields.
- b. They are gaining ground experience and making their mark.
- c. In due course, we will introduce them and support them to serve their residents well, like all the women MPs today.
- d. I believe their diverse backgrounds will also help us establish more partnerships with other organisations to champion issues of concern to Singaporeans.

26. As WW Chairperson, I expect more hard work too. With our seasoned WW activists, I'm very confident that you understand what's at stake.

27. Every GE is a battle for our future.

- a. Our vote will decide who can help to take our nation forward.
- b. The PAP is here to serve our people, in good times and bad, whether to counter SARS and Covid-19, or longer terms challenges like ageing population and climate change.
- c. But more than that, our ground work, day in day out, at MPS and party outreach efforts, away from the limelight, is what truly helps PAP win the hearts and minds of fellow Singaporeans.

28. Whenever GE may be held, let us be ready. Let us stay humble. Let us forge ahead, "Singapore Together, Majulah Forever!"

29. Happy Women's Day!