

Speech by Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong at the National Citizenship Ceremony 2013

Members of the National Integration Council Friends and fellow Singaporeans

First, let me extend my warm congratulations to the new 132 Singapore citizens. Though you may be new Singaporeans, most of you are not new in Singapore, having lived here for many years. You have chosen to make Singapore your home and I welcome you most warmly.

Contributing to Singapore's Success

Being a Singaporean has its benefits, but also its obligations. While you enjoy the privileges of a citizen, you also have a responsibility to contribute to your country, Singapore. Singapore, as you well know, is a small country. It has no natural resources like an abundant supply of land or oil; its primary resource are its people. It is the people who built up Singapore, with their drive, hard work, entrepreneurship and frugal habits. These were the values of our immigrant forefathers and I believe you share these values too. Without the will and hard work of its people and leaders, Singapore would not succeed. Singapore today is, of course, better off than 50 years ago, but for it to continue to be better off for you and your children, we will have to work harder together as one united people, whatever our race and religion, and regardless of where we grew up.

Singapore is a diverse society

As new citizens, you would be keenly aware that Singapore is a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. It has become even more diverse as we welcome new citizens and Permanent Residents. The glue that binds our diversity is our freedom to practise our different cultures and religions in a harmonious way. We can do this because we hold dear another value – tolerance.

I believe most of you have followed the Our Singapore Conversation or OSC. It is very clear from the OSC process that Singaporeans want a society anchored on common values and principles, on togetherness and a sense of kindred – or “kampong” spirit. Today, as you formally join the Singapore family, I encourage you to consider how we, as Singaporeans, can practise these values and principles in our daily lives. At home and at work, how do we live up to our National Pledge to work as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion? How do we maintain justice and equality in what we do, so that we can achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation? The Prime Minister at his National Day Rally has mapped out the Government's plans and approach to achieve a fair and just society. But it would be wrong if we just sit back and wait for the government to do all the work and give us the fruits. We too must do our part to plant the trees, grow and nurture them if we wish to have a share of the fruits. We can build a better home only if we care for and strengthen the relationships between the people living in the home.

Integrating into the community

These can start right at our doorstep, like finding out more about the cultural practices of our

neighbours, the kinds of food they enjoy, and how they celebrate their festivals. These cultural customs are integral to the Singapore identity – not just the identity of the individual races or religions. Your Singapore friends and neighbours are also likely to appreciate, and reciprocate, your initiative to reach out to them. It is by building relationships with those around us that we show our care for our home and our community.

Mdm Ng Meei Ling, who is present today to receive her citizenship, is one such role model. When she first arrived alone in Singapore at age 16 more than 20 years ago, she found it difficult to adjust to life here. However, over time, she made many friends, and learnt some Hokkien and Teochew to complement her Cantonese. She counts her neighbour of more than 10 years, Mdm Lucy Chua, as one of her close friends. Mdm Chua is here today to witness her friend becoming a Singapore citizen. They would help each other to clear choked sinks, take care of each other's family members when they fell sick, and occasionally buy meals for each other's families. This is an example of the "kampong spirit" that Singaporeans want in our community.

Contributing to the Community

I would also encourage all of you to take the initiative to involve yourself in community events and activities. You can discover more about your new home and make new friends by joining in the many different activities available in the community, for example, interest groups relating to sports or the arts.

Giving back to the community is another meaningful way of getting involved. Mr Alban Olivier Salord, another new citizen here today, moved with his wife to Singapore and intends to start his family here. He holds family values dear and appreciates the strong respect for the elderly and family ties in Singapore. It is not surprising then that he has been volunteering with Life Community Services Society for four years, and helping children whose parents are in jail to provide a sense of balance and optimism in their lives. I hope many of you, like Alban, will reach out to the less fortunate among us to help us build a more compassionate society.

You can also play a part by volunteering with grassroots and civil society organisations. Your grassroots leaders are here today and you can take the opportunity during lunch to get to know them and find out how you too can contribute to the community.

We, the Citizens of Singapore

Singaporeans too must help new citizens integrate and adjust to their new home. They should try to reach out to the new residents to help them learn about local customs, social norms and lifestyles. Such efforts will help our new citizens integrate more easily into the community, avoid cultural misunderstandings, and build a more cohesive society.

As you recite the National Pledge and sing the National Anthem later, you are reaffirming your commitment to Singapore, your new home, through both good and bad times. Singapore will face many more challenges and crises. But the possibilities and potential are also boundless if we work hard, remain cohesive, and stay ahead of the competition. We now share a common future. This means that you too will now have to shoulder the obligations and responsibilities of being a Singaporean, even as you enjoy the benefits and privileges. Let us therefore work together to make Singapore the best home for all of us and our children in the spirit of our National Pledge

and Anthem.

Once again, welcome to the Singapore family.