

# Speech by Minister Josephine Teo at the PA Inclusive Awards Presentation Ceremony on 13 July 2018

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Integration and Naturalisation Champions and Grassroots Leaders

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Good evening. It is my pleasure to be here at the PA INclusive Awards Ceremony and Appreciation Nite 2018. **The Importance of Integration in an Increasingly Divided World**
2. We are here today to celebrate and recognise the efforts of our Integration and Naturalisation Champions, or INCs, in promoting community integration. Integration between locals and immigrants may not happen as spontaneously as we like, and I appreciate the efforts made by all our INCs to promote harmonious living between people of different cultures and backgrounds.
3. Around the world, we witness many instances of people who have become more inward-looking because globalization has threatened their livelihoods and they become more anxious about their future. This has trickle-down effects on their daily encounters with foreigners and immigrants. In the most extreme instances, this has resulted in violence, uncertainty and unrest.
4. For instance, after Brexit, there was an increase in racist and religious hate crimes, many of which were against immigrants. Anti-migrant protests were also held in some parts of Europe, with some turning violent and leading to casualties. **Singapore's current state of social harmony is something that we cherish, but we know that it doesn't come easy and we cannot take it for granted.**
5. We remain open as a global city and welcome those who can make a contribution to our economy and society. We strive for a workforce where locals and foreigners complement each other, and which together make Singapore a winner in the battle for economic competitiveness.
6. We strike a careful balance in our foreign manpower policy between meeting the manpower needs of businesses while not reducing their motivation to become more manpower-lean. We have many programmes to support businesses to become more productive and less manpower-reliant. Every business that hires foreign employees knows there are conditions to be met. They are expected to practise Fair Consideration; those that do not are taken to task. We give Singaporeans extra support so they can better access job opportunities, such as through Adapt and Grow initiatives. These efforts complement one another in maintaining a sense of harmony in our diverse workforce. **INCs' Role in Community Integration**
7. However, it's not just about our economy and workforce. On the social front, it does not take

much to trigger negative sentiments. With the widespread use of social media and the relative anonymity it provides, negative sentiments evoking an “us” versus “them” mentality can easily go viral, and spread far more widely and easily than before.

8. Ideally, people will embrace one another and naturally build communities of trust. Our attitude can be to just let things sort themselves out, but that carries a lot of risk as some countries have discovered belatedly.
9. In reality, it is always easier for people to stick with the familiar and maintain a distance from those they feel are not the same as themselves. The gaps widen whenever there are divisive issues. Beyond a certain point, once people have made up their minds to dislike and distrust one another, it's very hard to bring them together again. That is why we started the National Integration Council in 2009 to specifically address the integration of locals, foreigners and immigrants.
10. Together with partners in the community, workplaces, schools and the media, INCs have helped many more people to be aware of the potential fault lines and encouraged them to make a conscious effort to nurture bonds between people who do not naturally come together. As a result, we can better rely on ground-up efforts to snuff out the flames that incite disharmony.
11. The INCs play a key role in promoting integration in the community, by serving as bridges to bring together new immigrants and Singaporeans in the neighbourhood. Your efforts go a long way in helping to foster friendships and strengthen inclusiveness among people of different races, religions and nationalities in our community.
12. **I am heartened to see that the network of INCs has expanded, and the outreach to both locals and newcomers has broadened.** Since it was established in 2007, the number of INCs has more than doubled from 640 to almost 1,500 today. Last year, the INCs helped around 28,000 Singaporeans and newcomers to connect over various “One Community Fiestas” held across the nation.
13. Over the past three years, PA has also organised around 260 RC/NC chit-chat sessions. These sessions bring new immigrants and their neighbours together in an informal setting to better understand and appreciate each other's cultural practices and customs. To support the INCs' efforts, PA will step up its efforts and organise another 100 RC/NC chit-chat sessions this year. **Recognising Outstanding IN Committees and Projects**
14. This evening, we recognise **25 IN Committees and 17 projects** for their outstanding efforts in promoting community integration. My heartiest congratulations to all the winners! I would like to make special mention of two exceptional projects.
15. **First, Project Care and Share @ Paya Lebar.** This was a collaboration between the Paya Lebar INC, Sheng Hong Family Service Centre and several Immigrant Associations, such as the Singapore Pakistani Association, Nepalese Society and Indian Women's Association. Through a series of workshops, 50 volunteers from the different Immigrant Associations reached out to over 300 underprivileged children and bonded over activities such as reading, baking, Batik painting and Yoga. I was encouraged by how this project brought new immigrants and Singaporeans together to contribute to a meaningful cause.
16. **Second,** the **Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC IN Committees** organised a **Kids INC Carnival** last year as part of the GRC's One Community Fiesta. Inspired by “Kidzania”, this event saw many bold firsts in the carnival's conceptualisation, programming and space planning. The five-storey Bishan Community Club was transformed into an occupational theme park with role-play activities at 50 different occupational game booths. In total, the carnival attracted over 7,000 residents, allowing families and neighbours to bond with one another, and facilitating the integration of new citizens with the local residents. In the lead-up to the

event, 25 volunteers from the Mexican Association also engaged 100 underprivileged residents from Toa Payoh East-Novena to make more than 200 piñatas which were displayed at the carnival. Arising from this project, two interest groups were formed to enable the residents to continue pursuing their common passion for the arts.

17. These are just two examples of the wide range of inspiring work that INCs are doing to promote community integration. Thank you champions, for your dedication and contributions! **Conclusion**
18. Integration is a never-ending journey, both for newcomers adapting to existing norms, and for locals learning to embrace our expanded communities. It takes effort on both sides. Without bridge-builders like our Integration and Naturalisation Champions, many will not get started.
19. For our integration efforts to be effective and sustainable, **we must seek ways to multiply our efforts and build capacity in our community.** Congratulations to all the award winners tonight and keep up your good work!
20. I also strongly encourage all our INCs to actively seek opportunities to partner with other community organisations and groups, such as immigrant associations, schools and companies. Together, we can pool our resources to embark on more initiatives, and reach out to a wider community.
21. **Next year, we commemorate Singapore's Bicentennial. It is also the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Integration Council.** It will be timely then for all of us to acknowledge how extraordinary our social harmony is and how much it has allowed us to build a thriving nation. By staying open, connected and multicultural, **Singapore can remain a place where people of all origins unite to make a shining red dot, one we are all proud to call home!**
22. Thank you, and have a lovely evening!