

# Speech by Minister Khaw Boon Wan at the National Citizenship Ceremony 2014

Members of the National Integration Council

Friends and fellow Singaporeans

Today, we formally welcome 194 new Singaporean citizens, who have chosen to make Singapore their home. Among them are 32 families who have applied together as family units. Congratulations!

I believe all of you are already familiar with Singapore, as you have studied, worked, or lived here for some time.

## Our Singapore Story

Next year, we will celebrate our 50 years of independence. It has been an amazing and outstanding journey of nation building. It has very few parallels. Our Pioneer Generation dared to think big, make immense sacrifices, stay united and reach for the stars.

They worked hard to overcome the hardships during the early years to build modern Singapore. They lived and worked alongside one another, even though they were of different races and culture, spoke different languages and practised different religions. Over the years, they forged strong and lasting friendships across racial and religious communities. They treated one another with mutual respect, forged a strong community spirit and together built a common Singaporean identity, with a common vision for a better Singapore.

As a result, today we enjoy a strong economy, quality homes and an excellent health care system. We live in a peaceful country, raising our children in a safe environment with many opportunities for them to realise their full potential.

Our Singapore story is a story about individuals putting the society above self, and coming together to collectively build an endearing home for all. As PM Lee Hsien Loong put it in his National Day Rally, it is now our responsibility to continue and build upon their legacy. He called on all of us to be “the pioneers of our generation”.

## Making your contributions

As new citizens, you too can do your part, and make your contributions.

Each of you has a unique story and you can make your own individual contributions to Singapore. Some of you are already contributing to the lives of our fellow citizens through the work that you do.

For instance, amongst us today is Ms Sylvia Liew. Ms Liew came to Singapore more than 20 years ago, as a Primary 1 student. Today, she is a physiotherapist in our public hospital, providing care to patients with Parkinson's disease. Apart from helping her patients, she trains other healthcare professionals on methods to assess balance and movements. She also conducts talks for Parkinson's disease support groups. She is making a valuable contribution to Singapore.

Others contribute through volunteering. In fact, you could start by volunteering in activities right here in Woodlands, in your neighbourhood, through grassroots or community activities. You can also support causes you feel strongly about, be it helping low-income families or spending time with under-privileged children.

Take for instance, Madam Neelakantan, who is receiving her citizenship today. Madam Neelakantan serves as a parent volunteer at her daughter's primary school. Her husband has been serving as a grassroots leader in Woodlands for nearly 10 years and has helped bring our residents closer together by organising events such as Deepavali and Chinese New Year celebrations. He is also leading a chess interest group. Inspired by the work that he does, Madam Neelakantan will be joining him in grassroots activities as well. Both of them derive satisfaction from helping others.

### *New citizens can help bridge differences*

Singapore is particularly proud of its inter-racial and inter-religious harmony. Against the many racial and religious conflicts elsewhere that we read about daily, the state of affairs here is truly extraordinary. We must treasure it. We must not take our peace and harmony for granted. It requires every one of us to continue to preserve what is important to us – our social harmony; mutual respect for each other; and graciousness when sharing common spaces. We will also need to impart the values that we hold dear to our younger generation so that Singapore remains the peaceful and harmonious country that our Pioneer Generation had painstakingly built. Our ability to rise above our differences will define us, and reflect a Singapore society that is mature and progressive.

As new Singaporeans, you can play your part to reach out to those who have newly arrived on our shores and help them understand our customs and norms as you are better able to understand the challenges they face adjusting to a new environment. At the same time, you should continue building lasting relationships and widen your networks with your fellow Singaporeans.

### *Singapore, Our Home*

This ceremony marks the beginning of your citizenship journey. Today, you join our ranks as fellow Singaporeans. We share a common purpose and a collective vision for a better future, not just for ourselves but also for our children and their children.

Singapore is our home. Let us embrace the spirit of tenacity and enterprise to overcome any challenge that comes our way. Let us protect and defend what is important to us: equality and unity, regardless of race, language or religion. Let us play our part to build a better future for our country. Let us write the next chapter of our Singapore Story together, and with confidence.

Once again, welcome to the Singapore family.