

**SPEECH BY MS GRACE FU, MINISTER FOR CULTURE,
COMMUNITY AND YOUTH AT WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY ON
SATURDAY, 4 JUNE 2016, 10.00AM AT SINGAPORE SPORTS HUB**

Mr Tee Tua Ba,
Chairman of the Singapore Red Cross,

Mr Benjamin William,
Secretary General of the Singapore Red Cross,

My colleagues from the Health Sciences Authority,

Good morning to all of you. I'm so happy to join you at the 13th
World Blood Donor Day.

2 I am humbled to be in the company of Champion Blood Donors. As champions, you have given so much more of yourself than most. I understand that 24 of you have each given 200 units of blood, and 105 have each given 100 units. To have donated over 100 times, not to mention over 200 times, is not an easy feat. You have made special effort to donate regularly. You probably have taken steps to ensure that you do not defer a donation over many years. Such is your dedication and discipline. Today, we celebrate your spirit of giving, and the countless lives you have saved.

70th Anniversary of the National Blood Programme

3 We are here also to celebrate the momentous occasion of the 70th anniversary of the National Blood Programme, which has been supported by selfless volunteers since the Second World War. Since then, blood banking processes and technologies have certainly improved to make blood transfusions easier, safer, and better for both donors and patients.

4 Our seasoned blood donors may remember the days when they had to look for a mobile blood donation bus plying the streets of Singapore, or wait for donation drives at their work places or community centres. Today, the Health Sciences Authority and the Singapore Red Cross have 4 donation centres island-wide with new satellite centres in Dhoby Ghaut, Woodlands, and Westgate set up in the past five years. In addition, there are ten mobile donation drives that visit schools, community clubs, workplaces, and religious centres every week. Efforts to improve greater access to donation facilities have helped to boost blood donations steadily over the years. In the past decade, we have seen the donor pool grow by 40 per cent and total blood donations by about 35 per cent to over 112,000 donations last year.

Nurturing the Next Generation of Donors and Advocates

5 While these are encouraging figures, we should strive to do better. We need to reach out to our youths to nurture the next generation of donors and advocates. In this regard, I am happy to see that the Red Cross has embarked on new ways to engage young people, through online platforms and their mobile app “Red Cross Connection”. Their online campaign, giveblood.sg, shares inspiring stories about how blood donations have given the recipients a new lease of life. The Red Cross also works with schools to nurture young humanitarians through initiatives like the Youth Ambassador programme.

6 Perhaps we should try crowdsourcing in blood donation for a friend, or a relative of a friend. It is more compelling if the appeal is made by a known recipient. I made my maiden donation when I was in the university when a university mate needed blood. An open call was made and many of us responded. During those times, we didn’t have social media or crowd sourcing platforms. It was through word-of-mouth, through old fashion email that blasted through the faculty. But nevertheless, it worked because it was a person that we knew, a person that we wanted to help. And many of us stepped forward for the first time. And after I crossed the hurdle of the first time, I have been donating blood regularly, although not as regularly as our Champion Donors here.

So it is a good way to get us started and also get us onto the path of being a regular blood donor.

Partnering the Community for Blood Donations

7 I am also glad to note that HSA and the Red Cross are forging stronger corporate partnerships to further their cause. Organisations such as ExxonMobil, Hewlett Packard, SMRT and the Singapore Armed Forces have come on board to organise blood mobiles for their communities. Other community groups have also found these drives meaningful. Bedok C2E (Community Emergency and Engagement Committee) organises blood drives three times a year without fail. A team of their volunteers even conducts home visits to publicise upcoming drives. Here, the community have taken ownership over the blood donation mission which underscores the relevance and vibrancy of the National Blood Programme. At my Ministry, MCCY, we have a mobile blood donation drive every quarter. Such an activity, at MCCY and at companies across Singapore, not only boosts blood donations, but bonds colleagues as they gather together to do good.

8 These blood drives are an invaluable way to drive home the message of shared responsibility and community. When we donate, when we give up part of ourselves for someone else, we are helping a

fellow human being, we are sacrificing ourselves for someone's life. I think this is an ultimate act of philanthropy and sacrifice. We become part of a community and I think it binds us as a people together. As Mr Tee said, it is regardless of race, language or religion. Blood connects us all. A society where we care for one another, have a sense of togetherness and give to those in need, is a united society. This will lead us to become a more caring and cohesive society.

Meeting the Future Challenges of the Blood Programme

9 The National Blood Programme has been helping to build that sense of shared responsibility over the last 70 years.

10 As a young girl, in the early 70s, I remember a very tragic industrial accident. The accident which happened on the ship called Spyros. Mr Tee was probably involved in the crisis management of that. There was a massive explosion on the ship at the shipyard, and as a result many workers on the ship suffered severe burns. There was a call to the community for blood, and people queued up. There were long lines of people waiting, queuing up to give blood happened in Singapore. I think that was quite a pivotal moment in nation building. As a young country coming together, helping fellow Singaporeans who suffered a tragic accident, really left a very deep mark in me. And that to me was a very

wonderful sight of a blood donation drive, that it bring us together as a people, and we all come forward, galvanised at that moment.

11. So right now we have 71,000 registered blood donors in Singapore. But really to put this in perspective, as Mr Tee said, it is only less than 2 per cent. And as Mr Tee very appropriately painted the picture for us, we are facing an aging population, which means that life expectancy is longer and with medical intervention, actually more procedures and more surgeries can be done to prolong life. And in each and every one of our lives, we are probably expected to have many pints of blood given to us during those surgeries. So the need for blood actually is increasing. But if we are not able to grow the proportion of blood donors, we will have quite a serious problem.

12. So it is important for us, not just to encourage and nurture the 2 per cent registered blood donors but also to expand the pool. And this is where I think all of us can do so. Encourage your friends, your relatives to step forward. For giving blood as I said, is really the ultimate act of philanthropy. We talked about how people, they are so big hearted and wanting to help another, giving a part of you, giving your blood really can be done by everyone, anyone. You don't have to be rich. You just have to be rich in your heart.

13. So thank you to all the blood donors, the Blood Champions for showing the way. Thank you to all, especially Red Cross and HSA for bringing the programme together for the last 70 years. Let's continue on this journey of giving, and bring more of our families, friends and colleagues along with us. Hats off to you, to all the champion blood donors. Thank you to all the blood donors for your selfless sacrifice.