

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT THE
LAUNCH OF PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE 2022, AT FOOD
FROM THE HEART COMMUNITY SHOP @ LENGKOK
BAHRU ON WEDNESDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2022, 10.30AM**

Mr Eric Chua, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Development, and Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth

Mr Chew Hock Yong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Development, and Co-Chairperson, President's Challenge Steering Committee

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good morning. I am happy to be here today to launch this year's President's Challenge.
2. Let me begin by thanking our donors, partners, and volunteers for their sustained commitment. President's

Challenge began with the aim of bringing together people from all walks of life to help communities in need. Despite ongoing restrictions to large-scale events, President's Challenge 2021 raised \$15 million to support 93 benefitting agencies. Thank you for being a steadfast pillar of support to those in need as we battle the pandemic.

3. Over the past two years, lower-income families have been the most susceptible to the negative impacts of the pandemic, such as job displacement and social isolation. I heard about their experiences first-hand during my visits to a few Family Service Centres last year, where some had shared about their challenges coping with the pandemic. More worryingly, findings from a recent Singapore Longitudinal Early Development Study conducted by the Centre for Family and Population Research revealed that lower-income families with young children have been the hardest hit group. 20% of households in rental flats had someone lose a job during the pandemic – twice as high as the overall average for all households. Slightly over half of those living in rental flats also do not have savings of at least one month

of their family's income. Reflecting the impact of the pandemic, the number of households assisted through ComCare Short-To-Medium-Term Assistance (SMTA) increased in Financial Year 2020 by about 24 per cent, to about 35,700 households. The quantum of ComCare assistance disbursed under SMTA also increased in the same financial year by about 77 per cent, to around \$183 million.

4. While Government support schemes such as ComCare and the COVID-19 Recovery Grant (CRG) can help families cope with the financial impact of the pandemic, it is more critical that they are empowered to achieve self-reliance and success in the long run. In particular, we want to look out for lower-income families, who may require a helping hand to get back on their feet. We want to ensure that children can grow up in a safe and supportive environment, their parents can become self-reliant, and together, the family can overcome their challenges and pursue their aspirations. This is why Government has introduced programmes like ComLink, where agencies and community

partners come together to empower these families to improve their circumstances and build up resources for a brighter future.

5. To take this one step further, I have designated the focus of President's Challenge 2022 to be 'Supporting Lower-Income Families'. The family unit is the bedrock of society, and the first line of support we turn to in times of hardship. To build a resilient society, we must support families so we can nurture individuals who can contribute meaningfully and lead fulfilling lives.

6. President's Challenge 2022 will thus encourage community efforts and partnerships to accelerate the advancement of lower-income families, and mitigate the long-term impact of the pandemic on them. We will approach this in three key ways: by empowering lower-income families, by caring for families that may need additional support in meeting immediate needs, and by rallying the community to render help.

7. The concept of empowerment has been central to President's Challenge in recent years. We started the Empowering for Life Fund (or ELF) in 2018, to provide

customised and upstream support to communities in need in the areas of skills upgrading, capacity-building, and employment. Since its launch, ELF has been successful in closing the last mile in sustaining employment. This focus will continue for President's Challenge 2022.

8. One initiative that seeks to empower families is Project Up by Lutheran Community Care Services, which aims to enable lower-income families to achieve upward social mobility. The project addresses underlying multi-stressors faced by the individual and family members. Through a three-year programme funded by ELF, Lutheran Community Care Services will work with families to accumulate savings, sustain employment and school attendance, as well as meet other milestones.

9. President's Challenge 2022 will also support initiatives to look after the more immediate needs of these families. We are here in Lengkok Bahru today at the newest Community Shop of Food From The Heart. Food From The Heart is one charity that has introduced innovative initiatives to provide reliable, consistent and sustainable food support. Due to the pandemic, it

has seen an increase of more than 20 per cent in the number of beneficiaries supported through its programmes. Community Shops like this one will enable beneficiaries to pick 12 food items of their choice every month. There is a good range of items available – rice, canned food, bread spreads, and even fruits and vegetables. Besides the Community Shops, Food From The Heart also rallies the community to support the Project Belanja! programme, which enables beneficiaries to redeem cooked meals from participating hawker stalls. Beneficiaries are accorded the dignity of choice, and with this assurance of food assistance, can focus their energy towards improving their circumstances post-pandemic.

10. Since its inception in 2000, the support of the community has been integral to the success of President's Challenge. Many of our community partners and social service agencies have ramped up efforts in support of this cause and I thank them for their hard work. Meaningful partnerships between the people, private and public sectors will be the driving force for collective impact in the years to come.

11. As we tackle the challenges of transitioning towards a COVID-resilient nation, we must continue to uplift the lives of communities in need. President's Challenge 2022 will raise funds for a total of 81 benefitting agencies across a broad variety of causes, to help them tide through these difficult times. I look forward to your support and partnership. Let us continue to uplift communities and empower lives.

12. Thank you.
