

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT THE PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE 2018 APPRECIATION NIGHT ON WEDNESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2018 AT 7.25PM AT ISTANA**

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Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

1. I am pleased to once again host the Appreciation Night for President's Challenge. Last year's Appreciation Night was my very first President's Challenge event, so tonight's event is very meaningful to me as it marks the first complete year of my close association with President's Challenge.

2. The Appreciation Night is an occasion for us to acknowledge the support of the partners and donors of President's Challenge. This is important, because President's Challenge relies on the goodwill of the community. The theme of today's Appreciation Night signifies how we as a society can empower those less fortunate to seek a brighter future together.

3. President's Challenge was started almost two decades ago with a simple but noble aim of raising funds for the less fortunate. Over the years, our philanthropic landscape has matured. But we also face new challenges. Technological advances, for example, has affected some groups disproportionately. Our social support system

has to correspondingly evolve, which is why going forward, President's Challenge will also need to look into more customised and upstream support.

4. One way to do so is to support disadvantaged individuals through enhancing their skills and employability. Employment is important, as it helps them sustain a livelihood and be independent. More importantly, it helps these individuals and their families regain dignity and self-worth. This is the reason I decided to establish the Empowering for Life Fund (ELF) under President's Challenge. As we talk about SkillsFuture and lifelong learning as a nation, it is perhaps even more critical that we support those who are less fortunate to upgrade their skills, so that they too have fair opportunities to secure employment.

5. I am happy to note that this new direction of President's Challenge has found strong resonance with our community partners and donors. To date, PC has managed to raise over \$2.5 million for ELF, which is more than a quarter of our five-year target. Since I announced the establishment of the ELF, a number of projects addressing the needs of the vulnerable have already started. We have also received more than 50 projects proposals in the latest call for proposals.

6. One such VWO currently tapping on the ELF is Metta Welfare Association, which provides special needs youths with skills training. As all of us know, those with special needs may sometimes need more customisation in their learning, so Metta tries to tailor the learning environment for them. Take for example, Heng Shen, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of five and who is present today. Later tonight, all of you will be receiving a bottle of cookies baked by Heng Shen. He learnt his baking skills at Metta Café which provides F&B vocational training, including baking, food preparation, customer service and table cleaning for service users of Metta Welfare Association. ELF supports Heng Shen and other youths with special needs through skills training in a familiar environment, where they receive actual job training and wages. Like many of his seniors in Metta Café, Heng Shen and his friends look forward to being placed in open employment eventually, where they will reach another stage of independence. Next year, as we commemorate Istana 150, I hope to provide more beneficiaries like Heng Shen with opportunities to showcase their talents in our commemorative souvenirs and events.

7. Another programme supported by ELF is the NTUC LIFT-UP Pathfinder, where low-income families receive customised training to level up their employability, skills and resilience. The programme supported Mdm Erna Salim with her career aspirations of becoming a professional accountant, by first introducing her to a workshop which enabled her to better envision her future career path. She went on to sign up for pre-admission course by the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants, which earned her an opportunity to advance to the next level of becoming a professional accountant. Erna plans to further her course so that she can be certified by the Singapore Accountancy Commission.

8. Apart from ELF, President's Challenge continues to support the Silver Volunteer Fund, as well as a range of other social causes including children and family services, healthcare and eldercare, disability services, rehabilitation of ex-offenders, as well as sports, the arts, heritage, culture and nature which have long-term positive social impact on the nation. I am glad that President's Challenge is on track to raise over \$13 million this year.

9. More donor organisations have stepped up to join us on this meaningful work of doing good together, from 47 in 2013 to 82 in 2018. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our new donors, some of whom are household names like Sheng Siong, Sian Chay Medical Institution, Maybank, and Bengawan Solo. I would also like to acknowledge the long-standing support for the President's Challenge by some of our key partners, including Keppel Care Foundation, Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, Lee Foundation, Mediacorp, SingHealth, Stephen Riady Foundation, Mr Terry Tan, as well as our Challenge Sponsor, Tote Board Group.

10. Some of our partners have gone a step further to involve the community in their fund-raising. Health Promotion Board raised \$143,000 for President's Challenge through their popular National Steps Challenge Community Challenge. Every step that the participants took contributed to this amount. This is an innovative way to rally the population to keep active and contribute to charity at the same time

11. Beyond monetary contributions, I am glad that President's Challenge has been rallying Singaporeans to contribute their time and skills to support the underprivileged. In particular, because of our focus on youth volunteerism this year, we are seeing more youths stepping up to participate in the President's Challenge Volunteer Drive. To date, over 8,000 youth volunteers have stepped up to support President's Challenge this year, almost 40% more than last year. This is an encouraging trend.

12. I would also like to take this opportunity to mention some groups that had mobilised their youths this way. ITE has shown exemplary efforts in holistic giving by including President's Challenge beneficiaries in their activities, on top of their monetary contributions. ITE will be receiving tokens of appreciation later for both volunteerism and donations.

13. This is what the SG Cares spirit is about – rallying everyone to build a more caring and inclusive Singapore together.

14. I would like to conclude by thanking all of you for being a part of President's Challenge this year. The strong and committed support of our partners is what helped sustain the President's Challenge over the past 18 years. This has enabled President's Challenge to evolve to meet the changing needs of the vulnerable in Singapore. I

hope all of you will continue to journey with us. Together, we can build a more caring and inclusive society.

15. Have a good evening.

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