

**OPENING ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT  
THE LAUNCH OF PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE 2021,  
MONDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2021 AT NTUC HEALTH TAMAN  
JURONG SENIOR ACTIVITY CENTRE**

---

Mr S Iswaran, Minister for Communications and Information

Mr Lew Chuen Hong, CE IMDA

Mr Bill Chang, CEO, Group Enterprise and Country Chief Officer,  
Singtel

Ms Chan Su Yee, CEO, NTUC Health

Ladies and Gentlemen present here and tuning in virtually,

1. Good morning. I am happy to be here today to launch this year's President's Challenge. I am glad that some of us are able to gather here physically – something that we used to assume to be the norm in the past, until the COVID-19 pandemic hit us.

2. Almost exactly one year ago to this very day, Singapore raised our Disease Outbreak Response System Condition, or DORSCON level, from Yellow to Orange. I recall that I was away

in Indonesia for a State Visit when I was briefed on the rapidly deteriorating global situation before the Government announced the elevation of the DORSCON level. It was unfortunately a prescient warning of what was to come. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on public health systems and economies worldwide. Singapore was also hit hard, particularly in some industry sectors like aviation and tourism.

3. In the social service sector, many smaller social service agencies faced difficulties in raising funds to continue their good work, and in some cases, even to sustain their daily operations. This was very worrying, as it was a double whammy on their beneficiaries – the vulnerable groups in our society are the most susceptible to the negative impact of the pandemic, such as job displacements and social isolation, while the agencies helping them were themselves struggling to stay afloat.

4. These agencies and their beneficiaries urgently needed help, which was why I made a call out through President's

Challenge last year to mobilise our community resources to help the vulnerable groups in society. It is in times of crisis that we draw strength from one another. I am glad that Singaporeans answered the call readily. Individuals and communities banded together to help through various ground-up initiatives, while others supported by volunteering and donating generously. Despite not being able to hold any large-scale events, President's Challenge 2020 managed to raise \$15 million and support 72 beneficiary organisations.

5. This feat was a poignant one – the President's Challenge started in 2000 to help these smaller social service agencies raise funds, and we have continued this mission to this day on our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Let me thank everyone who made this possible.

6. The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed our way of life, from the way we interact with one another to the way we work. It has hastened digitalisation. Many businesses are

going online as consumers have increasingly turned to e-commerce platforms to shop. More people are using digital solutions like e-payments. Families are using digital tools such as Zoom to keep in touch.

7. However, it also has the potential to widen the digital divide.
  - a. Those who are unfamiliar with these technological tools or who do not have access to them stand to face challenges in their digitalisation journey.
  - b. More risks in the digital domain will also emerge, endangering those who do not know how to identify or mitigate them.
8. As our society capitalises on the opportunities arising from digital technology, we must ensure that all segments of society stand to benefit and that no one gets left behind. This is why I have designated this year's focus of President's Challenge to be on 'Building a Digitally Inclusive Society'.

9. I am heartened that since I announced the PC2021 focus in August last year, more social service agencies have paid attention to promoting digital inclusion of vulnerable groups in our society.

a. For example, The St John's Home for Elderly Persons plans to implement a SMART Video Communications System throughout its facilities. This system allows its elderly residents to make video calls to their families, friends and doctors easily. President's Challenge 2021 will be supporting this programme.

b. Another example is the F&B Digital Training & Placement Programme under Bizlink Centre Singapore Ltd, a non-profit organisation dedicated to serving disadvantaged individuals through training and employment. The programme aims to train its beneficiaries on online food ordering and fulfilment-related skills. Beneficiaries in this programme will be able to stay relevant in the F&B industry that is increasingly moving towards

digitalisation, and get the chance to be matched to F&B employers upon completion of their training. The Empowering for Life Fund under President's Challenge will be supporting this programme over the next three years.

10. These projects are good illustrations of how social service agencies can support their beneficiaries on digital inclusion. I hope that more will be inspired to do the same.

11. I am glad that many organisations have also stepped forward to join the Government and social service agencies in this effort.

a. For example, this morning, volunteers from Singtel taught seniors to use simple mobile apps and gave them online safety tips, as part of the company's long-term commitment to promote digital inclusion within our community.

b. Volunteers from TRIGEN, a group of medical professionals from SGH, as well as youth volunteers from Youth Corps Singapore, Heartware Network and Hwa Chong Institution, have also collaborated with Senior Activity Centres such as NTUC Health and Lions Befrienders to help seniors tap on the opportunities in a digital society.

12. We should build on this momentum to encourage more of such collaborations. Digital inclusion has many facets beyond access and literacy. As the digital landscape changes rapidly, we need the entire community to come together to build and strengthen our digital resilience. To do so, we need to understand and collectively address the digital needs of different segments of our society. Only then can we be closer to realising our vision of becoming a digitally inclusive society.

13. **I am therefore pleased to be launching the Digital for Life movement today.** The movement aligns well with the overall theme of Empowering for Life, a direction that I have charted for the President's Challenge since 2018. By upgrading skills and capabilities using digital technologies and solutions, we not only uplift vulnerable groups, but also bring about more sustained changes to their lives.

14. To bolster this effort, President's Challenge will provide a seed funding of \$2.5 million to the Digital for Life fund, a new fund that IMDA will be setting up as part of the Digital for Life movement to support digital inclusion projects and activities on a national level. A key thrust of the fund is in empowering disadvantaged groups, which is a good extension of what President's Challenge had been striving to do over the past few years.

15. Over the next three years, IMDA aims to raise another \$2.5 million for the Digital for Life fund. The Government will match all



donations dollar-for-dollar, bringing the Digital for Life fund size to \$10 million in total.

16. The Digital for Life movement and Fund brings us a step closer to achieving Singapore's vision of becoming a digitally inclusive society. I hope that companies, social service agencies and Singaporeans will continue to walk the path together towards Singapore's digital future. Share your ideas and stories, collaborate with one another and build a safe and accessible digital environment for all.

17. The year ahead will be a challenging one. While the vaccination programme is a welcome development in our fight against COVID-19, the virus is still a threat globally. Economic headwinds will likely persist in the near term, and it would probably take some time for the world to recover fully. As we forge ahead, let us not forget those who are most vulnerable amongst us. **President's Challenge 2021 will continue to**

**support a broad range of social causes this year, including raising funds for a record total of 92 beneficiary organisations, to help them tide through these difficult times.**

18. So in closing, let me once again thank all donors, partners and volunteers for your contributions to the President's Challenge year on year. Your strong support will continue to make a difference to the lives of each and every single beneficiary. Together as a nation, let us continue to uplift communities and empower lives.

19. Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*