

# Speech by DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the National Citizenship Ceremony 2012

Members of the National Integration Council, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you this morning, especially the 136 new Singaporeans who are each gathered here with your family and friends because you have made the major decision to cross a bridge in your life and make Singapore your country and home.

## Succeeding for Singaporeans

Singapore has just celebrated 47 years of nationhood. Through the years, we have worked together to overcome numerous challenges. We have raised the standard of living of the average Singaporean to amongst the highest in Asia, and higher than many developed nations. We have achieved great social mobility in a few decades, with large numbers of Singaporean families having started off with little but moving up, owning homes and having good jobs. We have our problems too. But they are problems that we can solve.

We have achieved this because of the efforts of our immigrant forefathers, and the contributions of generations of Singaporeans who have worked together for a better future - for themselves and their families, and for our country.

We are an immigrant nation that has built its own identity. The majority of today's generation of adult Singaporeans have either parents or grandparents who were born abroad, but eventually sank roots here. Our forefathers were initially strangers to each other, did different jobs and often lived apart, in different parts of the island. They became neighbours and colleagues. Their children grew up together in our schools, did NS together for the boys, and became friends who rarely thought of the different countries their parents came from. They feel Singaporean first.

Our circumstances have changed with each decade, and will keep changing. But our ability to keep improving as a nation, and our ability to keep overcoming problems, will continue to depend on the same national virtues that brought Singapore to this point –

- that we each strive to improve, in whatever we do;
- that we make the effort to work with each other and make friendships, regardless of our diverse origins;
- that we provide real opportunities for every Singaporean to discover their potential and grow, regardless of their starting points; - that we welcome committed people like you to contribute to our nation;
- and that every new member of our Singaporean family makes the effort to integrate, understand our cultures and develop the unique Singapore spirit.

That's still the basis for our success - Singaporeans who live and work as one united people to

forge a better future for all. It is not so common a virtue in the world today.

## **Interact and Engage**

As new citizens, I encourage you to form meaningful relationships with your fellow Singaporeans, and join us in strengthening our social harmony.

Coming from different backgrounds, it is only natural that there are some cultural differences between locals and new citizens. I encourage you to engage within the community, especially in the neighbourhood where you live. It is the easiest and best way to understand, respect and embrace Singapore's unique values and practices.

Let me share with you an example of such integration. Mr Wei Haiming, 40, is here today to become a new citizen. I know Haiming as he has become an active volunteer in my constituency, Taman Jurong, where he lives. He works quietly, but has a great sense of responsibility. He is already a Taman Jurong First Aider, a Dengue Prevention Ambassador, and takes the initiative to help the elderly in the community. Plus he is an active promoter of integration amongst new citizens. Haiming's approachable and team-playing ways are winning him friends in the community.

Integration is therefore something that is not difficult to do in the community where you live. It is not just something in the mind, but something that comes about when we all take the initiative to interact.

I also urge you to discover as much as you can about your new home and community. Expand your social networks in schools, at work and in your neighbourhoods. Strike up friendships with the fellow Singaporeans whom you come into contact with. It helps to learn some English, if you did not learn it in school. Even if you are not fluent in English, it helps in making friends with Singaporeans of all races and contribute to our social harmony.

## **NS – A Common Bond**

Among us today also are 13 young men who are either currently serving or have completed National Service. We appreciate their commitment to their new home. I know that they have forged solid friendships with their fellow NSmen, having gone through many shared experiences.

I would like to share the thoughts of Mr David Mui<sup>1</sup>, who just completed NS in January this year. To him, NS is a good opportunity for Singaporeans of different backgrounds as well as PRs to get to know one another and to truly communicate with each other. His best friends were made through NS, [I quote] "because in NS we go through a lot of things together that you can't experience in the outside world."

Whether it's National Service or other forms of community involvement, every one of us can contribute to a better community in our own way, be it in the neighbourhood where we live, in our school or at the workplace.

## Conclusion

Let me congratulate you once again on becoming Singapore citizens and warmly welcome you to the Singapore family. I wish you all the best as you involve yourself in the community, and contribute to this country we all call home. Let us work together for a brighter future for ourselves and our children!

<sup>1</sup> Mr Mui is currently working as a field technician. He contributed his thoughts on NS to the National Integration Council Secretariat.