

Speech by Dr Yaacob Ibrahim at the National Citizenship Ceremony 2011

National Integration Council members

Community Leaders

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy that we can all come together this morning at the fifth National Citizenship Ceremony.

Today is a significant day in the lives of 133 of you gathered here. Today, you become Citizens of the Republic of Singapore. Singapore is a young country – we just celebrated 46 years of nationhood. But those 46 years have been remarkable years for us. We started as an independent island-nation without resources, with nearly two million people to feed – not all of whom had education, jobs, or even clean water. A determined first generation of leaders did their utmost in every possible way to ensure Singapore survived. Singapore has not only survived but succeeded and thrived in today's highly competitive and challenging world. Today, I call upon you as our new citizens of Singapore to help build on that success – as a society that is united, peaceful and progressive. Many earlier generations of Singaporeans came here from the region and further beyond. They toiled to build Singapore to what it is now, starting families and giving us new generations of Singaporeans who are all passionate about Singapore. As the late Mr S. Rajaratnam, one of modern Singapore's founding fathers, once said, "Being a Singaporean is not a matter of ancestry. It is conviction and choice."

Unity in diversity

Singapore continues to welcome new citizens for the rich diversity and vibrancy that they bring to our nation. And as we cherish this diversity, we must always hold dear the Singaporean values of multiracialism and meritocracy that hold us together. We must continue to bond as a community that believes in opportunities for all, regardless of race, language or religion and build a shared future together. I am confident our new Singaporeans will embrace these values that define us and help enlarge the common spaces that help bind us as one people even as we celebrate our unique diversity.

To help new citizens along in their journey of integration, we started the Singapore Citizenship Journey in February this year. Mr Gautam Rampuria¹, who has completed the Journey, felt that it was well-organised and that it was useful for new citizens as it helped them to have a better understanding about living in Singapore. The completion of the programme, however, is not the end, but only the beginning of a lifelong journey of discovery and involvement in Singapore society. I encourage you to continue deepening your appreciation of Singapore, your new home, reaching out to your fellow Singaporeans and working together for the good of the country and the community you live in.

Contributing to the community

I would also like to share the example of Mr Ooi Leong Chai², a gardening enthusiast who grew up in Malaysia. He became a Singapore citizen in 2009 and has been very active in the Community Garden Interest Group of Whampoa South Residents' Committee. Mr Ooi takes leave from work to host and interact with students on learning journeys to the RC garden. He also volunteers with the Citizen on Patrol team and joined RC members to promote and help put up the State Flag for residents in the estate during the recent National Day period. Mr Ooi is a good

example of an active citizen who believes in being involved in the community.

Indeed, there are many ways that you can contribute to your community. You can choose to volunteer at a welfare home or be part of a community outreach programme. You can help a less fortunate neighbour or even contribute your professional skills to those in need. The People's Association (PA) provides excellent opportunities for you to get involved in activities organised by the Residents' Committee or Community 5 Clubs. Many of your grassroots leaders, including Integration and Naturalisation Champions, are present here this morning. Do approach them after the ceremony to learn more about the various activities that you can be a part of. No matter what you do, whether in your neighbourhood, workplace, school or community, your contributions will certainly make a difference.

Making Singapore our best home

Let me congratulate all of you once again on becoming Singapore citizens. I hope that you will continue to discover more things to love about this country and share the values that we hold dear. Let us work together, as Singaporeans, for a better future for ourselves and our future generations and to make Singapore our best home.

Thank you.

¹ Previously from India, Mr Gautam will be receiving his citizenship certificate at NCC 2011. He is 42 years old and is a Company Director.

² Mr Ooi is a 49 year old carpenter.