

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB  
AT THE PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE 2019  
APPRECIATION NIGHT  
ON WEDNESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2019 AT 7.35PM  
AT ISTANA**

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Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

1. Thank you for joining me at the President's Challenge Appreciation Night. Tonight, we honour 72 donors, partners and volunteers who have contributed greatly to our efforts to help the vulnerable.

2. With strong support from our donors and partners, we are set to raise more than \$13 million for President's Challenge this year, to support 67 beneficiary organisations that offer critical services and enhance the quality of life of the needy. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our key supporters: Far East Organisation, Keppel Club, Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, Lee Foundation, Mediacorp Pte Ltd, SingHealth, Stephen Riady Foundation and Mr Terry Tan for their contributions. I would also like to express my appreciation to our Challenge Sponsors, Tote Board Group and Singapore Pools.

3. I am glad that in recent years, we are also seeing more community-led initiatives in support of President's Challenge. One such initiative that deserves special mention is Relay Majulah. Over eight and a half days, more than 200

runners from all walks of life came together to do good as a collective effort. We witnessed the last leg of Relay Majulah at the President's Star Charity Show last weekend. The runners can be very proud of themselves for far exceeding their original target and making a significant contribution of \$1.6 million to the President's Challenge this year. Beyond the funds raised, such community-led initiatives harness the power from within the society to support those in need, which is what President's Challenge stands for. Equally important are the inspiring stories behind some of the runners, who have themselves bounced back from adversities in life and are now helping others do the same.

4. Another example of a community-led initiative is the 'Be The Change We Want' Art Exhibition by Vincent Seet. Vincent, a two-time stroke survivor and self-taught artist, put his skills to good use by setting up this charity art exhibition and donating the proceeds to President's Challenge. I hope Vincent's example will inspire more fellow Singaporeans to step up to help those in need.

5. This year's focus for President's Challenge is on mental health. Through this focus, we aim to raise awareness for persons with mental health conditions and support them in their journey of recovery and reintegration. The paperweight door gift that you will receive later was sewn by Ah Moy, who is battling depression. With the assistance of Singapore Anglican Community Services and supported by the Empowering for Life Fund (ELF) under President's Challenge, Ah Moy is now able to earn a living by doing home-based sewing. Ah Moy's story illustrates the importance of an ecosystem of support in uplifting those in need. I am happy to note that this year, ELF has raised over \$2.4 million in support of 11 social service agencies. I hope that this can translate to better support for people like Ah Moy.

6. The coming year will see the President's Challenge move on to a new focus which is equally meaningful – to empower persons with disabilities. A 2016 Quality of Life study conducted by the National Council of Social Service found that 6 in 10 persons with disabilities believe that they will not be able to achieve their hopes and dreams. This is rather sad, and we need to do more to return the sense of purpose and aspiration to this group.

7. So how can we do that? For a start, I think we can do better in recognising the contributions that persons with disabilities can still make in our society. Disability does not mean inability. Indeed, I have met many persons with disabilities who have unique talents that surpass many of us, in areas such as art and music. Every person is uniquely different and equally worthy of being treated with respect and dignity. So let us reframe our thinking today, and see disability as being differently abled, rather than a lack of conventional abilities.

8. Apart from our mindsets, we should also do more in making our environment more inclusive to our friends with disabilities. Inclusion can take many forms. It can be as simple as ensuring that activities and places are accessible to all, especially for persons with disabilities. While we have achieved good progress in making buildings and public transport more accessible, we can always strive to do better.

9. For instance, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is exploring new initiatives to make its exhibits more accessible. We have with us today some exhibits from the SAM TOUCH Collection which include audio-guides to cater to the visually impaired. I invite everyone to take some time later to visit the exhibits. This year, President's Challenge funded the Contemporary Art for All Programme by SAM, which aims to integrate persons with mental health conditions and persons with disabilities into the community through art. As a community, I hope we can support more of such programmes in future.

10. More can also be done to provide persons with disabilities with greater access to employment opportunities. With the right kind of support, persons with disabilities can also contribute and bring value to organisations and businesses. Over the past few months, I have visited several organisations such as Bizlink Centre and Abilities Beyond Limitations and Expectations (ABLE), which provide skills training, capacity building and employment services for persons with disabilities. Their determination to achieve independence and earn their own living left a deep impression on me. I hope that more employers will adopt inclusive hiring practices and leverage technology to enable more persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the employers who have provided employment to our persons with disabilities and I urge them to share their experiences with other employers so that we will achieve a greater multiplier effect. President's Challenge 2020, and particularly the Empowering for Life Fund 2020, will provide more support to such meaningful programmes next year.

11. In closing, I would like to thank all of you again for being a part of President's Challenge this year. Your generosity and support are invaluable in our effort to serve the less fortunate. I hope that all of you will continue to be with us in this journey to build a more caring and inclusive Singapore.

12. Have a wonderful evening.

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