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**SPEECH BY GUEST-OF-HONOUR, DR TEO HO PIN  
MAYOR OF NORTH WEST DISTRICT, MP FOR BUKIT  
PANJANG AT THE LAUNCH OF THE YELLOW  
RIBBON PREPARE AND PLACE (PnP) PROJECT 2007  
ON WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 07 AT ADMIRALTY  
WEST PRISON**

Mr Kong Mun Kwong, Chairman, SCORE,

Mr Chua Chin Kiat, Director of Prisons,

Mr Desmond Chin, CEO, SCORE,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

A very good morning to all of you

2 Thank you for inviting me to grace this event. First of all, I would like to congratulate all of you for the effort to help re-skill and find employment for offenders.

### *Upgrading of Skills*

3 As we all know, the economy is growing, and the job market has improved. Jobs are being constantly re-created as our economy restructures and we move towards a globalised world. As a result, old jobs become obsolete. One of the main groups that are affected by this are those who have little or no educational qualifications, have been unemployed for a long time and have lost confidence in themselves. This is also the category that the majority of offenders fall into. Therefore, we need to encourage them to upgrade themselves and to acquire new skills, so that they too can contribute towards building the Singapore of the future.

### *Community-driven project*

4            Helping the needy to become self-reliant is an integral part of the North West Community Development Council's (CDC) mission. The launch of the Yellow Ribbon Prepare & Place (PnP) Project 2007, a community-driven initiative led by North West CDC, aims to help at least 60 per cent of the participating inmates in each placement exercise secure employment months before they are released.

5            Last March, we worked with CARE Network to organise a similar job fair at Admiralty West Prison which helped 307 offenders find employment.

6            Our experience working with inmates has shown that many of them are equipped with employable skills and can contribute at work and to society if they are given the chance. We believe that this initiative is a win-win one, not just for the inmates, but also for the employers and the community.

### ***Training the inmates***

7           For the first time, selected inmates will be trained for the interviews during this exercise by our career consultants.

We hope that by training the inmates, they will find it easier to find a job and hence integrate seamlessly back into society.

8           To the offenders present here today, I know life has been difficult and challenging for you. I urge you not to give up – if dealt with well, the obstacles that we face will make us stronger, more resilient and better able to face life.

### ***Managing the challenges ahead***

9           Maybe a short story about a caterpillar will help illustrate what I am trying to tell you.

10          Have you ever wondered how a small, ugly looking caterpillar can transform into a butterfly? One man did. He was

so interested in this transformation that he stared at a cocoon and waited for the butterfly to emerge. Soon, he was rewarded – he saw a small tear in the cocoon and what looked like the top of a butterfly’s head starting to emerge from it.

11        After a few minutes, the caterpillar stopped moving. The man decided that the caterpillar was stuck, and that it would be a nice thing to help the caterpillar come out.

12        So he took a pair of scissors and snipped a small hole at the opening of the cocoon, thinking that it would make it easier for the caterpillar to come out. He did make it easier, because soon, a butterfly emerged from that opening.

13        However, the butterfly never did fly, and died a few days later.

14        You see, what the man didn’t realise is that the struggles, heartaches and pains of life are necessary if you want

to be great. For the caterpillar, struggling to come out of the cocoon on its own would have helped it develop his muscles and wings that would have helped it fly. For us, the struggles and heartaches help make us stronger emotionally, and mentally.

15        For the offenders present here today, there will be challenges and temptations awaiting you upon release. The road ahead will be difficult. For some of you, these issues will be waiting for you as soon as you are released; for others they may appear a few weeks or months later. When they do happen, it is important that you find the strength, courage and confidence within yourself to overcome them.

16        I understand that there were ex-offenders who participated in the previous job fairs and have made a success of their lives. Today, it is your turn to be presented with that opportunity to stand on your own two feet – an opportunity to succeed just as those before you have; an opportunity to display your strength and resilience; and most importantly, an

opportunity to become successful for the sake of your parents, your spouse, your children.

17 Remember, you need not walk alone. There are other people around to support you. These people consist of your friends, family, the CDCs, SCORE, Singapore Prisons Service and other community partners.

### ***Being self-reliant***

18 However, I think it is important for each and everyone of us here to take ownership of our lives and our actions, to learn to be independent and to stand on our own two feet. The first step has to come from you. Others can help, but their efforts will be useless if you do not help yourself. Like the caterpillar, if we struggle and overcome challenges ourselves, these challenges will help make us stronger, fly higher and live longer. You have to want to stay free from drugs and crime. You have to want to make a success of your life.

19        If you sit back and wait, you will not grow and neither will you be able to grasp the wonderful opportunities that await you. Remember, you are not your past, and neither are you your habits. Old habits can always be replaced with new, more beneficial and fulfilling ones.

### ***Conclusion***

20        Finally, I would once again like to thank the organisers of this Prepare n Place exercise for working tirelessly behind the scenes. To our employers who have contributed in making this event successful, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To each and every one of you who have worked hard to organise this event, know this – you are not only helping that one reforming individual but also his or her family, as well as helping to build a safer community for all of us.

21        Thank you and have a good day.