

Speech by Mrs Lim Hwee Hua at SCWO 30th Anniversary Gala Dinner

SPEECH BY MRS LIM HWEE HUA, MINISTER IN PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, SECOND MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND TRANSPORT, AT SINGAPORE COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATION 30TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER, 31 MARCH 2010, 8:45 PM AT ISLAND BALLROOM, SHANGRI-LA

Mrs S R Nathan

Guest of Honour,

Dr Ann Tan

President of SCWO,

Mrs Laura Hwang

Organising Chairperson of 30th Anniversary,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Nothing beats an opportunity such as tonight to honour the many women who have contributed in different ways to each and every life here in Singapore. I count myself fortunate to be able to represent many such women who have not been individually named. I therefore would like to thank the SCWO for so kindly recognising me tonight and to humbly share this Wall of Fame induction with the many women who have toiled long and hard to build the Singapore economy and more importantly, our families.

2 The induction that I have received tonight really sums up the many opportunities I have received in my life. These include opportunities to a good education despite my humble background, having come from a large family of nine children, nestling in a rental flat for most of my childhood. These also include opportunities to compete on my own strengths at the workplace, first in the public sector, then the private sector and now as an elected Member of Parliament to serve the residents of the Aljunied GRC.

3 But these opportunities would have gone unfulfilled were it not for the generosity, support and encouragement that I have been so privileged to receive along the way, from both men and women, and especially from my family. Indeed, if my father had been traditional and not seen the value of education for girls, or my Pre-U form teacher not motivated me to apply for a scholarship to study abroad, or my family had not encouraged me onto new responsibilities as a Member of Parliament, I would have missed out on many opportunities to realise my own potential or to serve in a different capacity.

4 These opportunities were accessible to me regardless of my gender, race or religion. Of course, we can never change the inherent bias that we humans may have but I am grateful that the government of the day, at each step of the way, worked hard and consistently emphasised the importance of meritocracy.

5 As a woman, I am acutely aware of the challenges and prejudices that my counterparts face in most other parts of the world. Many are denied education even at the most basic level. Others, who may have been educated, face blatant discrimination at work and in society at large. Yet others bear the brunt of traditional practices and stereotypes that disadvantage women. Hence, many may conclude that we women in Singapore have it a little easier. Regardless of the comparisons, I believe we should build on what we are able to do here and maximise our potential to the fullest extent possible.

6 Let me share my thoughts with you regarding where I think we women can take greater strides, that is, in assuming leadership positions – in politics, in business and in society at large. There will never be more than 24 hours in a day but there will always be that responsibility that we women have towards the future of Singapore. I would like to urge more women to step forward and not to be shy about offering yourselves. Women are slowly occupying more leadership positions in business. This is great. Let's continue to support even more women to enable them to rise to the top even in hitherto male dominated professions.

7 That there are now 17 female Members of Parliament, will hopefully encourage more women to contemplate a possible role in serving a wider public. This is really an extension of the role that we are already playing when raising families and contributing to the economy.

8 Finally, lest the men think this is another feminist war cry, let me thank all the men present tonight for your support and graciousness. You have, by your very presence, demonstrated your enlightened view of the role that women can play. Thank you all, once again, for this honour. Have a pleasant evening.

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