

**SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT  
ORANGE RIBBON WALK 2012 ON SATURDAY 7 JULY AT  
MARINA BAY SANDS EVENT PLAZA**

Good Evening

Mayors

Zainudin Nordin, Chairman, OnePeople.sg

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to join you for today's Orange Ribbon Walk. Today, we gather together as Singaporeans – as one people of different race and religion, different cultural and ethnic backgrounds but united in our national identity, bonded by community ties, supporting each other and living in harmony. We gather together to signal our commitment to collectively maintain this precious racial and religious harmony and launch the Orange Ribbon Celebrations, a month long island-wide movement to foster respect, friendship and trust among all within the community - regardless of color and creed. Singaporeans are indeed fortunate that we live in harmony with one another, in stark contrast to the frequent sectarian and religious clashes that

occur in our region and the World. Will Singapore always be so fortunate and able to maintain peace and harmony between people of different race and religion in our home? We must, but it will take constant effort to build good relations with each other. Indeed, the Orange Ribbon Celebrations marks the anniversary of the racial riots in 1964, as a reminder that relations can go awry, if not carefully tended to.

2 The 1964 racial riots was one of the darkest chapters in Singapore's history that engendered in turmoil, hatred and loss of precious lives among our own people. A year after this incident, Singapore was at the crossroads of independence. A fledgling nation founded against this incident faced uncertainty of a secure and peaceful future. This was compelling context in which our National Pledge was forged and crafted by the late S.Rajaratnam, Singapore's first Minister for Foreign Affairs.

3 A people divided by race and religion knew from painful experience the damage and havoc it wrought. Singaporeans longed for a nation whose citizens were united regardless of race, language and religion. This was the reason the words in our

National Pledge resonated with the people when it was penned and all of us recited it in our growing years. Speaking to young Singaporeans in school and National Service, I know that they too believe in the words of our Pledge.

4 Today, we see a very different Singapore, with significant progress, stability and peace. All of us recognize that this is not the norm but the exception. There is racial and religious strife over many parts of the world. Singaporeans also recognize that we can never take this peace and harmony for granted.

5 This is why Singaporeans support measures to nip racial and religious intolerance in its bud and laws that provide for quick action against those who would incite such hostility, be it in the real or virtual world.

6 Social media is a neutral tool and netizens have a critical role to play in nurturing positive social norms. We should not let the few with divisive words erode the confidence and trust many have built over the years. Here, the silent majority who treasure

religious and racial harmony need to speak out against unjust and bigoted views. Even so, we should do so in respectful tones that calm and not incite further tensions.

7 This year, the Orange Ribbon Celebrations calls on us to reflect on our pledge; what it means to be united, “regardless of race, language or religion”. Such reflections serve to instill pride, passion and a sense of identity on what it means to be a Singaporean. I am pleased to hear that OnePeople.sg is leading this effort as a bottom up movement, working hand in hand with the Community Development Councils, Self-Help Groups, People’s Association, government agencies and community stakeholders.

8 In conjunction with the Orange Ribbon Celebrations, there will be a host of community activities to bring people together at neighbourhood levels. I understand 60,000 Orange Ribbons have already been taken up by schools, community and religious organisations to promote respect and understanding. People can also engage online, through the “What’s Your Story?” portal by posting pictures and sharing stories that capture the essence of

our pledge. There will also be a national pledge campaign to provide opportunities for community reflections and aspirations. This initiative, by the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, will be launched today, as part of the Orange Ribbon Walk. I hope as many of you will take this opportunity to participate in these initiatives during the Celebrations and strengthen bonds.

9 I am told the Orange Ribbon Walk will be organised each year, as a stand against racism and a rallying call for peace and harmony. I support this movement and am heartened by the strong show of solidarity here today and your support for the cause. Let this Walk be a symbol of our commitment to treat every resident, indeed all whom we meet in Singapore and elsewhere, with respect and dignity.

I wish you an enjoyable evening ahead.

Thank you.