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Distinguished Ladies, I am very honoured to be given this opportunity to speak to a distinguished gathering such as this. I wish to convey a warm New Year' greetings to all of you from women's organisations in Malaysia.

2. In Malaysia, apart from achieving objectives of improving and developing women, activities of voluntary organisations have also brought together the various communities that make up the populace of the country. It should be stressed that in a multiracial country such as Malaysia, the role of voluntary organisations in bringing unity to its people is of prime importance. It is therefore a great pleasure for me to talk about "Malaysian Women in Voluntary Organisations".

Distinguished Ladies,

3. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." This saying makes it clear, the importance of the role that women play in bringing up the new generation and determining the future of mankind. Women have an important role to play in all aspects of life from education and up bringing of children, to training and leadership and to nutrition and health. All these make a full and meaningful life for Man universally.

4. Malaysia is a developing country, and since its independence in 1957, the number of women who have obtained higher education and who have joined the professions, have steadily increased to a level that we can be proud of. The professions involved include public administration, education, law, medicine, engineering, accountancy, business and politics. Women, besides being involved in their careers and professions, are also encouraged to give voluntary service to society. Both these functions have to be managed wisely so that they do not affect adversely women's role as principal homemaker.

5. Activities in voluntary bodies are also carried out by women with primary or secondary education, and by women who do not work outside the home. To ensure that voluntary activities for the welfare of society, involving individual expertise and contributions, can be properly coordinated and managed, women participate in voluntary organisations. Up to December 1982, the number of women's associations registered at the national level were 67.

6. Activities carried out by these organisations can be divided into areas like education, economy, arts, health, religion and law. Activities in these areas are through projects like seminars, workshops and training courses, study tours, art shows, cultural performances, exhibitions, research, publications and sports. To raise funds to finance such activities, voluntary organisations have charity dinners, "walkathons", film shows and food and funfairs.

7. All the major organisations are grouped together under the National Advisory Council for the Integration of Women in National Development (NACIWID). The chairperson and members are appointed

by the Government on the advice of the various women's organisations. The secretariat of NACIWID is in the Prime Minister's Department. NACIWID was established to advise the Government on issues facing women so as to lead to an improvement of their situation in society and in the economy. As part of its functions, it commissions studies to assess situation in various areas.

8. The activities carried out by women's organisations show that women in Malaysia have long been aware of the problems faced by society in adapting to the rapid changes in the process of development, and that solving such problems require the coordinated efforts of all segments of society. It is unrealistic to expect the Government and its agencies to resolve such problems alone. The establishment of voluntary women's organisations that will carry out activities to improve and develop women, are therefore encouraged. This is the sign of a very healthy development in the evolution of the nation and country.

9. Many of these women's organisations have affiliated themselves to an organisation called the National Council of Women's Organisations. This Council is a purely non-governmental body, even though it gets an annual subvention from the Government to partly finance its activities. It sets out to advise the Government on the views of women and the issues facing them. It also coordinates the activities of its members.

10. The projects which are carried out by women's organisations include those that help to improve their potential in the various professions. Other projects try to prevent certain social problems from occurring, or where this is not possible, to prevent them from becoming alarming issues.

11. The rapid economic development of the country has meant changes in the whole social structure and in social values. In a bid to achieve the material benefits available in towns, rural youths have migrated to towns in large numbers, and subsequently giving rise to social problems. The 'rat race' in towns has led to various kinds of pressures and tensions. To overcome these pressures and tensions, or to obtain the material items which they cannot get through other means, some of these youths are lured to drug addiction and crime. Because of that, voluntary organisations have undertaken projects like leadership and vocational training, projects to protect women and girls, lectures on religion, classes to develop talent in the arts and in household management, as well as to provide hostels and suitable accommodation for girls who have to work far from their homes. Among the organisations which carry out these activities are the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), the Malaysian Youth Club Associations (Majlis Belia Malaysia, MBM) the Muslim Women's Welfare Board (Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam), Women's Section of the Sarawak United Indigenous People Party (PBB, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu Sarawak), Sabah Women's Association and FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) Women's Associations.

12. With the increasing number of women who go out to work either to help out the family income or as sole bread earner for the family, come the growth of nurseries and kindergartens. Various voluntary bodies like Armed Forces Welfare Organisation (BAKAT), Muslim Women's Action Association (PERTIWI), the National Electricity Board's Wives Association (PELITAWANIS), Malaysian Ceylonese Congress, and the Young Women's Christian Association have taken steps to prepare an early education for children by providing for them mini libraries, centres for activities and recreation, as well as providing training for those who are going to run the nurseries and kindergartens.

13. In order to ensure a better future for children who are poor or mentally or physically handicapped, various projects have been carried out by BAKTI (Association for wives of Cabinet ministers and deputy ministers), Women's Journalist Association (PERTAMA), Selangor Indian Association, Muslim Women's Welfare Board (Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam), and Muslim Women's Action Association (PERTIWI). Projects in the form of cultural shows and concerts, funfairs and film shows, are all aimed at collecting funds for scholarships, or to cover medical expenses to provide artificial limbs and for physical rehabilitation of the handicapped.

14. For women in the rural areas, projects for the improvement of maternal and child nutrition, as well as home economics, have been devised. Associations which have undertaken these sort of projects are the University of Malaya's Women's Associations, Sabah Women Teacher's Group and Felde's Women's Association.

15. A number of associations like PPSEAWA Malaysia, Ikebana International Kuala Lumpur Chapter, the Women's Institute and Girl Guides, are branches of world-wide associations. These associations undertake the same type of activities as their counterparts overseas. They form a link in the chain of friendship between Malaysia and other countries and can further strengthen the relationship between Malaysian women and their sisters in the rest of the world.

16. Wives of officers and staff in Government Ministries and Semi-Government bodies formed associations that aimed at establishing close rapport among them. At the same time they also act as a coordinating body to inform the wives on the work that their husbands do, so that they can give better support at home. These organisations range from PAPITA, the association for wives of officers in the Diplomatic and Administrative Service, to PERKEP for the wives of staff in the police force, PELITAWANIS, for the wives of those in the National Electricity Board, and PETRONITA, the wives of those in Petronas, the National Oil Company. The umbrella body for such organisations is PUSPANITA, which aims to coordinate and monitor all these activities.

17. History has shown the openness of Malaysia to outside influences. Without firm spiritual belief, pseudo-western ways of thinking, sciences and psychology may contribute to the deterioration of traditional values and way of life. Modernisation, development and progress may all be identified with the West. The Malaysian "Look East" policy is basically a way of looking into ourselves and to pick out and perpetuate the best and most enduring of Malaysian traits and culture that would make a firm basis for a Malaysian identity.

18. To implement this strategy, all activities carried out by women's organisations will incorporate and will emphasise Malaysian norms and traditions.

19. Voluntary associations' projects like cookery classes can emphasise the use of local materials and domestic and traditional recipes. It has been shown that traditional Asian cookery tend to have more nutritional value and are lower in terms of calorie and cholesterol content, than modern Western fast foods. However, advertisements have made these Western fast foods, using foreign and therefore more

expensive ingredients, more attractive than local dishes. Malaysian traditional dishes, just like other Asian traditional dishes, have different recipes that are suitable for adults and children, for the poor as well as the rich.

20. A similar situation exist with regard to family health and small scale farming. Families are encouraged to grow local and traditional vegetables and herbs, either for decoration round the house or in vegetable plots. Traditional vegetables, herbs and shoots, used in the daily diet, have been proven by modern medicine to have nutritional and curative values. Therefore, these plants can be used not only to beautify the house, and its surroundings, but also as the basis for home medication.

21. Similarly, in kindergartens and nurseries, local folklores and fairy tales, songs and verses, as well as traditional children's games which have wide educational value, can be utilised and made more popular. Children should also be given more frequent exposure to local handicrafts, arts and designs, dances and dramas.

22. Sewing and embroidery classes, as well as handicraft classes, organised by voluntary bodies utilised and popularised local materials and local techniques. Traditional crafts like cane-weaving, rattan weaving, handicrafts using bamboo and pandanus leaves and embroidery with gold thread are further encouraged, so that the small group of traditional craftsmen can be increased in number and their crafts made popular and perpetuated. Such local handicraft, when improved and popularised, can become an industry based on the planting of basic raw materials, their processing and crafted into saleable items.

23. I realise that research and studies on these local handicrafts and techniques may still be sketchy. This is one role which can and should be exploited by women's organisations.

24. Women today are more aware of their duties as a home-maker, leader and voluntary worker. They are also aware of the need to participate in the development of women themselves, in line with the development of the nation. Fortunately in Malaysia, the Government has given great encouragement to women in all their activities. The future of women's role in voluntary organisations, therefore, is bright. Ties within the country will be strengthened by the various expansion projects of each national organisation. We have now spread our ties and friendship overseas with neighbouring countries and the Far East. It is with this objective that I stand before you as a representative of the Malaysian Women Voluntary Organisations to talk to you about us in Malaysia, so that there will be an exchange of information and ideas, which I know are boundless in Japan.

25. May I conclude by wishing you, distinguished ladies, success in all your endeavours in the year 1983 and many more years to come.

Thank you.