

Remarks by Mr Teo Chee Hean, Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs at the Safe Roads SG Campaign Gala Dinner Held On 1 Dec 2011

Good evening to all of you.

First of all, I would like to say thank you very much for being at the dinner this evening, and for contributing to this worthy cause.

Why is road safety important? Let me share with you a true story. Today I received an email from one of my residents in Pasir Ris. In his email, he said that he was very worried because he had lived in Pasir Ris for more than 20 years, and yesterday, there was an accident in his precinct for the very first time. Although he was happy that the ambulance came within five minutes to ferry the victims away, he asked me whether I could look into this to see if there were any issues. I said: "OK, I will be very happy to do so." So I thought about what could be the issue here. One possible issue could be design: maybe there were blind corners, maybe the road was slippery, or maybe the line of sight was bad. Or perhaps one of the motor vehicles had brakes which failed.

At the same time, I think the reason for quite a number of unfortunate accidents really is safety consciousness – whether people pay attention to their own safety and the safety of others. Of course, the government can impose fines on people who violate traffic rules. That is one solution.

But in fact, there are some groups of vulnerable road users whom we are very concerned about, and we should pay more attention to improve their road safety consciousness. If you look across the different user groups, one group of people involved in many accidents are the motorcyclists. Sometimes, they may be pushed off the roads by larger vehicles, or they may not have enough safety consciousness. Many of them are young people, and some of whom lose their lives or are permanently injured in road accidents. That is a loss not just to themselves, but also their families.

Two other groups of people are also very vulnerable – young children and old people. They also need more road safety education. Some older people may have problems walking up and down the overhead bridges because it is too much

of a physical strain for them, and they end up crossing the roads in a way which may not be safe. In some cases, their eyesight, hearing and reflexes are not as good, so their judgment is impaired. I remember going to the Shell Road Safety Park as a primary school student, where I learnt many aspects of road safety. I still retain this knowledge such that whenever I cross the road, I still follow the same drill.

For young people and older people, there is a lot that we can do to help educate them and give them a greater sense of road safety consciousness, to protect themselves. For general road users, we need to give them a greater sense of safety consciousness so that they not only protect themselves but are also considerate, and protect the lives of fellow road users. We hope they do not end up causing unfortunate accidents which affect somebody else's life, livelihood and family.

So these are the key messages that the Road Safety Council is trying to get across to our people. They go beyond the issues of road design, car safety or enforcement, and are really about a sense of safety consciousness for yourself and to others. This public education is best done by community groups reaching out to people, and this is what we are trying to achieve with the Road Safety Council. Does the effort have an impact on saving lives? It certainly does. As you can see from the statistics, nearly 200 fatalities a year and many more injuries are caused by road accidents. With greater awareness and care, we can reduce those numbers down to 50, or by 50%. Is it conceivable that we can reduce the number of road accidents to zero? You may think it impossible, but we should certainly try. We can save many many lives if we can achieve this outcome.

Thank you very much again for your generosity, and for your attendance this evening. I hope you will continue to support this effort and also encourage your friends to do so. I wish everyone all the very best.