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**Key Messages:**

- Express appreciation of support to 71 donors and volunteer partners. President's Challenge (PC) is on track to raise more than \$15 million to support 82 benefitting agencies
- Donors and volunteer partners have heeded the call of PC2022 to support lower-income families, through monetary contributions and community initiatives and partnerships that empower these families with skills and opportunities.
- PC2023's theme of "Caring for Caregivers" will look to build upon existing caregiver support efforts, to strengthen support and care of caregivers. Rally donors and partners to continue support of PC.

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB  
AT THE PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE APPRECIATION EVENT  
ON 24 NOVEMBER 2022, 7:25PM AT THE ISTANA**

Mr Aubeck Kam, Permanent Secretary of MSF and Co-chair of President's Challenge Steering Committee

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good evening. Thank you for joining me at the President's Challenge Appreciation Night. This evening, we are here to express our appreciation to 71 donors and volunteer partners

who have remained committed to supporting our communities in need, despite the challenges over the last two years.

2. Through the active volunteering and fundraising efforts of our donors and partners, President's Challenge is on track to raise more than \$15 million to support 82 benefitting agencies this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our key donors, Far East Organization, Sentosa Development Corporation, Sheng Siong Group and SingHealth, and also our challenge sponsor, Tote Board Group, for their generous contributions and continued strong support.

3. These efforts have enabled us to better support lower-income families. Over the last two years, these families have been more susceptible to the negative impact of the pandemic, experiencing job displacement for example, with the resident unemployment rate of non-PMET at 5.1%, significantly higher than that of PMET at 3.4%, in June 2021<sup>1</sup>. While Government support schemes have helped them cope with the financial

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics taken from Ministry of Manpower Labour Force in Singapore Advance Release 2021 (LFAR).

impact of the pandemic, it is critical that they are empowered to achieve self-reliance and improved quality of life in the long run. It was why I designated President's Challenge 2022's focus to be on 'Supporting Lower-Income Families' - to encourage community efforts and partnerships that can help empower these families with skills and opportunities, so as to mitigate the long-term impact of the pandemic.

4. I am heartened to see that the theme has resonated with our donors and partners, and they have brought the community together to support these families through their giving efforts. One such donor is SAFRA, who organised a series of charity events to raise funds to commemorate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. About 80 per cent of the funds that they raised will be channelled to benefitting agencies under the President's Challenge. One of them is CampusImpact, a social service agency that supports children from lower-income families, like 8-year-old Sofea. Struggling with learning difficulties, Sofea could not read, spell or write. Being unable to catch up with her peers had affected her confidence. To help her in her academics and provide emotional

support, Sofea was referred to CampusImpact by the Singapore Children's Society.

5. Through guidance in her learning and art therapy sessions, Sofea has discovered her strengths and is able to read and write with confidence now. Such programmes provide early interventions and are important in giving our children opportunities to have a good start in life. I visited a photography exhibition organised by CampusImpact a few months ago and witnessed how such programmes have enabled children from disadvantaged families to express their creativity and imagination through photographs.

6. Another donor is Singapore University of Social Services, who organised their first large-scale fundraising campaign to rally donations from students and staff through a series of initiatives. This included a fundraising challenge, where a team of three trekked an accumulated 2,500km to rally donations, as well as a bake sale. I understand that SUSS President, Professor Cheong Hee Kiat himself personally delivered muffins to donors! These

innovative efforts united SUSS' students and staff over a common cause to do their part for the community.

7. These efforts have helped uplift families and will enable them to achieve upward social mobility and resilience in overcoming challenges. By building strong families, we can nurture resilient individuals who can contribute meaningfully and lead fulfilling lives. One good example is Mrs Peh Jin Di's family, who was referred to RiverLife Community Services' Bless Family programme through a community outreach activity organised by the social service agency. Mrs Peh, who relocated to Singapore after marriage, struggled to integrate into the local culture. With the language barrier and limited social support, the family often felt helpless in times of difficulties.

8. The Bless Family programme, which is supported by President's Challenge, seeks to empower families with life skills and financial assistance. It has helped Mrs Peh's family cope with the monthly expenses and connected them with volunteers and other families. When I hosted Mrs Peh, together with the beneficiaries of RiverLife Community Services, to Picnic@Istana

in May this year, I was delighted to hear that her children also received academic and character development support from RiverLife Community Services, which has boosted their motivation towards learning and built their confidence in forming friendships. With increased social support, Mr Peh has recently found a full-time job and the family is working towards achieving financial stability.

9. Beyond financial assistance and social support, improving the employability of lower-income families and individuals is key to independence and integration into the society. Musical Theatre Limited is a social enterprise that provides persons with disabilities, ex-offenders and their families, a platform to showcase their talents. It also enables artists with differing abilities, like Mr Jaffar, who will be performing at the ceremony today, to showcase their musicals to audiences and gain a source of income.

10. Even as the pandemic eases, Singapore will face new challenges ahead. Rising incidence of mental health challenges and Singapore's rapidly ageing population will mean a greater

need for caregiving. While there are professional care service providers, emotional caregiving cannot be outsourced, and this role will often fall onto family members. Caring for your loved ones can be a 24-hours, seven-day a week responsibility. More caregivers of these groups will face caregiver fatigue and stress. Many may face challenges balancing work and personal commitments, with some having no choice but to leave their jobs.

11. These caregivers make up a critical pillar in the healthcare and social support systems. They need knowledge, skills and resources to manage their caregiving duties. In recent years, Singapore has made good progress in supporting caregivers. For example, the Alliance for Action for Caregivers of Persons with Disability formed by National Council of Social Service and SG Enable aims to connect, enable and empower caregivers to find timely and appropriate support. However, caregiving covers a wide spectrum and more can be done.

12. A whole-of-society effort is needed to provide more holistic support to all caregivers. NCSS' recent Quality of Life study on caregivers signalled a need for a stronger support ecosystem to

relieve caregiving burdens and help caregivers provide care more sustainably. I have designated the focus of PC2023 on “Caring for Caregivers”, to bring together the people, public and private sectors to consolidate efforts to equip caregivers with the mindset and resources to manage their caregiving duties. It is important to accord greater value and tangible support to those who take on the responsibility of caregiving. With more than one in two of caregivers feeling the strain of caregiving, supporting our caregivers will also provide upstream intervention to help our beneficiaries. I hope to have your continued support for this under-served group.

13. In closing, I would like to thank all donors and partners for your contributions to President’s Challenge year after year. Your generosity and strong support will continue to make a difference as we build a more caring and inclusive Singapore. Let us continue to empower lives and uplift communities.

14. Thank you.

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