



SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SAF VETERANS' LEAGUE, BRIGADIER-GENERAL (NS) WINSTON TOH, AT THE *KONFRONTASI* MEMORIAL CEREMONY ON 10 MARCH 2016, 1825HRS

Dr Mohamad Maliki, Senior Minister of State for Defence,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Thank you for accepting our invitation to this memorial ceremony, to remember the innocent lives lost, and honour those who fought valiantly for the survival of our nation during *Konfrontasi*.

2. In 1963, President Sukarno of Indonesia launched an armed campaign of *Konfrontasi* to destroy the Federation of Malaysia of which Singapore was then a part of. For the next three years, Singapore plunged into a period of fear and uncertainty, as saboteurs carried out a series of terror attacks on civilians. Our pioneers not only had to worry about their next meal, but whether they and their loved ones would make it home safely at the end of the day.

3. Despite the risks, Singaporeans stood together to defend all that we held dear. Some of our veterans from the First and Second Singapore Infantry Regiment (SIR) are present here today. LTC (Ret) Daljeet Singh, LTC (Ret) Syed Ibrahim and MAJ (Ret) Abdul Samad were young soldiers when they were deployed to the frontlines in Johor and Sabah to conduct operations against Indonesian incursions. There were casualties, but our forces persevered and emerged stronger and more determined from the fight. Our defenders also included ordinary Singaporeans who served with the Singapore Volunteer Corps, the Singapore Naval

Volunteer Force, and the Vigilante Corps, safeguarding Singapore with the Police during *Konfrontasi*. Some of them are also here with us today as well, such as SWO (Ret) William Wee, who vividly remembers how the Indonesian insurgents' rifle bullets whizzed past his head as he defended Singapore's coastline, and MAJ (Ret) Abbas Abu Amin, who recalls stepping forward to help defend Singapore, without any hesitation at all. Thank you all for your commitment and sacrifice.

4. Singaporeans must never forget the impact of *Konfrontasi*. Like Total Defence Day, which marks the fall of Singapore, *Konfrontasi* reminds us to never again take our peace and security for granted. In this ongoing fight against terrorism, there is no room for complacency. We need to brace ourselves to respond to an attack on our soil. As many have said, this is no longer a matter of "if" but "when". All of us need to be alert and vigilant, and develop the means to respond quickly and decisively when a crisis hits. Everyone has a part to play to keep Singapore strong and secure.

5. Today, as we stand before the *Konfrontasi* memorial, we remember the efforts and sacrifices of our fallen comrades and the victims of *Konfrontasi*. I hope that succeeding generations of Singaporeans, such as our young NCC cadets present here today, will continue to remember important lessons from this turbulent period of Singapore's history and have the resolve to do all they can to preserve our way of life.

6. May I now invite Senior Minister of State for Defence Dr Maliki to deliver his speech. Dr Maliki, please.

SPEECH BY SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, DR MOHAMAD MALIKI BIN OSMAN, AT THE *KONFRONTASI* MEMORIAL CEREMONY ON 10 MARCH 2016, 1830HRS

Good evening

BG (NS) Winston Toh, President of the SAF Veterans' League,

Veterans,

Survivors and family members of the victims,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. I am honoured to be at this memorial ceremony today, at the invitation of the SAF Veterans' League. On this day, we remember those who lost their lives or suffered during *Konfrontasi*. We also honour those who fought bravely to defend us during those turbulent years.

2. Last year, we unveiled this permanent memorial on the 50th anniversary of the bombing of MacDonald House as a way to mark the events that happened during *Konfrontasi*, to remember its victims, and educate the young about our past. During *Konfrontasi*, many innocent lives were destroyed in more than 40

acts of sabotage and violence on our soil but the worst attack took place on 10 March 1965, just across the road from where we now stand. A bomb planted by two Indonesian saboteurs exploded there. That particular act of terror killed three innocent civilians and injured 33 others. Some of those whose lives were affected by this terrorist attack are present here this evening. Thank you for taking time to be here today.

3. That period surrounding the *Konfrontasi* was a troubled time for the entire region. Today, with old wounds healed, we live in peace and cooperation with our neighbours. Our bilateral exchanges with Indonesia – state-to-state and people-to-people – are warm and growing. Both sides find mutual ways to respect and benefit each other. This is the way it should be and we will continue to grow that relationship.

4. We draw lessons from that dark chapter in our history, so that we can face today's challenge against a different threat from extremist organisations, one that threatens the security of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the region. Indeed, we

collaborate and share intelligence with our neighbours against this common threat. In the last decade it was Al Qaeda. Today it is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Tomorrow, it may be a different extremist group. **What they have in common is the goal to intimidate through violence, to create an aura of fear and uncertainty, to disrupt the lives of its target population. But as we did in the 1960s, we must not allow fear to overwhelm us. Singaporeans rallied together to defend all that we owned, and to keep our hopes for a better future alive.**

Men from the First and Second Singapore Infantry Regiment (SIR) were deployed to Johor and East Malaysia to fight the saboteurs. They fought bravely, but not all made it home. Nine of our soldiers from 2 SIR were killed while many were injured during operations in southern Johor. With our regular soldiers involved in operations away from home, ordinary Singaporeans stepped forward to take on the responsibility of homeland defence. When the Vigilante Corps was started in 1964, more than 10,000 stepped forward within two months, to play their part in defending Singapore. The Singapore Volunteer Corps, the Singapore Naval Volunteer Force, and the Vigilante Corps, joined

the Police in patrolling our waters and protecting our streets to guard against sabotage.

5. The threat of terrorists today has evolved and kept up with technological change. Extremist groups like the ISIS have taken to social media and the Internet to propagate their twisted ideologies, and attract followers from all over the world. Nearly 1,000 men and women from Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and even Singapore are believed to have travelled to the Middle East to fight for ISIS. When they return to their home countries, their militant experience and illicit networks will pose a direct and serious threat to their home countries and Singapore too. We see evidence of this in the profile of perpetrators behind the Paris attacks. Six of the French nationals behind the attacks were believed to have visited Syria and joined ISIS. Similarly, the alleged Indonesian mastermind behind the Jakarta attacks was believed to have coordinated the attacks from Syria, where he now resides.

6. ISIS has also inspired fringe groups and lone-wolf extremists to pursue acts of terror. Late last year, 27 Bangladesh nationals working in Singapore were also arrested for plotting terrorist activities to be conducted in their home country. And just last month, we deported four Indonesians who were allegedly planning to join ISIS in the Middle East. Our region is a hotbed for ISIS activity and Singapore is not immune from this threat. Last year, we detained one self-radicalised Singaporean youth for terrorist-related activities in April, and arrested another youth in May. The first youth had planned to join ISIS in Syria, and if he failed, he intended to carry out violent attacks in Singapore. His self-radicalisation journey began in 2013 when he started viewing terrorist propaganda online.

7. ISIS is adept at using modern media techniques to win new followers. The group has been known for their slick Hollywood-styled recruitment videos, its extensive use of social media and even for producing and distributing modified versions of well-known games that glorify ISIS and entice young, unsuspecting gamers to be part of ISIS' real-life battles. We have

to work at countering these extremist ideologies by alerting the authorities if we come across such content online, or if we know of individuals who appear to have been radicalised. This could save the individual from harming himself and others.

8. ISIS aims to establish a “satellite caliphate” within the region and a harmonious multi-racial and multi-religious society like ours is an affront to their worldview and values. Today, some militant groups in the region have pledged their allegiance to ISIS in support this call by ISIS for a “satellite caliphate”. To win more adherents to their cause, they will find ways to spread fear, sow discord among our communities, and destabilise our country. We must guard against similar attempts to tear our society apart from within. **Our Muslim community, supported by the other communities, must reject this idea of a “satellite caliphate” and uphold and defend our principle of multi-racialism and promote racial and religious harmony and peaceful co-existence.**

9. Our response to hybrid threats like these has to be one of Total Defence, with everyone playing their part to keep Singapore secure and resilient. We need to ensure that our defences are strong on all fronts – military, civil, economic, social, and psychological. Our security agencies will do all they can to keep the threats at bay, but it will not be enough. The ISIS-brand of terrorism is, at its core, a battle for hearts and minds. As I mentioned on Total Defence Day a few weeks ago, this makes it even more critical for us to strengthen our social and psychological defences, to prevent our fault lines from being easily exploited for extremist agendas. Community and religious leaders must step forward and guide their members with the moral and religious compass to fend off unwanted extremist views in the name of religion. We must work hard at building trust and creating common spaces among different ethnic and religious groups, as well as nurturing a strong sense of pride and belonging as Singaporeans. I am glad to see the presence of our religious leaders from the Inter-religious Organisations (IRO) today – showcasing our unique and invaluable manifestation of religious harmony. In the unfortunate event of a terror attack here at home,

we must respond as our pioneers did during *Konfrontasi* – by condemning the perpetrators, staying together as one united people, and helping each other get back on our feet quickly.

10. We can also be inspired by the resilience of the French in the face of terrorism. When multiple terrorist attacks in Paris claimed the lives of more than 120 victims in November 2015, the bloodiest attack in Europe since 2004, the initial shock gave way to a strong show of solidarity. Memorial sites sprung up at the scenes of the attacks and the slogan “Liberty, equality and fraternity” became a rallying call throughout France. The people of France refused to let terrorists dictate their lives. Just over two weeks after the attacks, Parisians picked up the pieces and proceeded as planned with the 2015 United Nations Conference on Climate Change, involving more than 140 world leaders and up to 40,000 attendees across 190 nations.

11. There is no doubt that we are in an ongoing fight against terrorism. This will be a long battle, one for the hearts and minds of our people, but if we stand together and have

the resolve to defend our way of life from those who seek to hurt and divide us, we will triumph.

12. Today, as we remember the scars left behind by terrorism on the anniversary of the MacDonald House bombing, we are also reminded that we should never take our peace and security for granted. Our painstaking effort at building our racial and religious harmony, which has been the envy of many international visitors, must go on. **Our determination to be prepared, and stay united and resilient in the face of terrorism may be the best way to honour the victims of *Konfrontasi*, and those who gave up their lives in the pursuit of peace.**

13. Thank you.